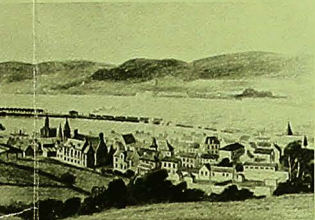


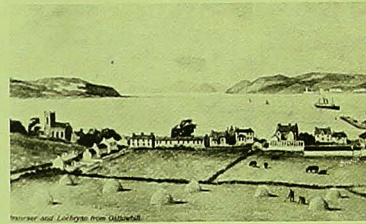
Historic Stranraer

E P Dennison **Torrie**

Russel **Coleman**



Stranraer and Loch Ryan



from Gallowayhill



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Historic Stranraer

the archaeological implications of development

E P Dennison **Torrie**

Russel **Coleman**

the Scottish burgh survey

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CENTRE FOR SCOTTISH URBAN HISTORY
Department of Scottish History
University of Edinburgh



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This account of the history and archaeology of Stranraer is one of a series of reports on the historic burghs of Scotland—known collectively as the *Scottish Burgh Survey*—all of which have been commissioned by **Historic Scotland** and its predecessors. Some 56 burghs have been surveyed during previous campaigns of the Scottish Burgh Survey (1978–90). *Historic Stranraer* is only the second survey to have been formally published (the first was *Historic Kirkcaldy*).

It is especially appropriate that Stranraer should have been surveyed this year—for 1995 coincides with the 400th anniversary of the creation of the burgh. ‘Stranreuer’ is first mentioned in a fourteenth-century document and, around 1520, the Adairs of Kinhilt, a family of Irish origin which arrived in south-west Scotland in the thirteenth century, built for themselves the castle which still survives in the town. But it was not until the autumn of 1595 that Ninian Adair was given permission by King James VI to create a burgh on land within his jurisdiction. Stranraer’s struggles for recognition and survival since then make fascinating reading. Throughout its history, Stranraer has always been a haven to travellers crossing between Ireland and Scotland, a role it fulfills to this day as the premier port for the Irish Sea crossing.

The main aim of *Historic Stranraer* is to identify those areas in the historic burgh which are of archaeological interest and therefore require sensitive treatment in the event of any proposed development or other ground disturbance. It is designed primarily as a working manual for the use of local authorities and archaeological curators. However, as an essential prerequisite to this assessment of the archaeological implications of development, it also describes and illustrates the geography and geology of the town, its known archaeology and history, its historic standing buildings and the origins of its street names—all of which will be of interest to the wider public, be they inhabitant, visitor or student.

The Scottish Burgh Survey is an initiative to analyse and make widely available the known archaeological and historical information about Scotland’s historic burghs, at a time when many of them are continuing to experience development pressures. As the relevant bodies work to ensure the continuing viability of historic town centres whilst also safeguarding the built heritage through sensitive conservation policies, individual burgh surveys are intended to contribute to this work in a practical way. Their publication also serves to remind a wider audience of the importance and vulnerability of historic town centres. The delicate balance between sustainable development and heritage conservation is not a new problem in historic towns: *Historic Stranraer* shows how the burgh’s residents and authorities have grappled with similar issues on and off over the centuries—albeit that the terminology was somewhat different in bygone days.

Historic Stranraer was prepared for Historic Scotland within the **Centre for Scottish Urban History**, which is part of the Department of Scottish History, University of Edinburgh. Dr E P Dennison Torrie, Director of the Centre for Scottish Urban History, and Russel Coleman, of the **Scottish Urban Archaeological Trust**, are co-authors of the report. Kevin Hicks, of the **Centre for Field Archaeology**, University of Edinburgh, is cartographer and illustrator, and Alan MacDonald of the Department of Scottish History acted as research assistant. The project is supervised by the Head of the Department, Professor Michael Lynch, and managed for Historic Scotland by Olwyn Owen, Inspector of Ancient Monuments.

The survey of historic Stranraer was entirely funded by Historic Scotland. This report has been published with financial assistance from **Wigtown District Council** and Historic Scotland. Further copies may be obtained from **Scottish Cultural Press**, PO Box 106, Aberdeen AB9 8ZE.

The Centre for Scottish Urban History is indebted to a number of people for their assistance and advice. In particular, **Mr Donnie Nelson** has generously given advice and access to material in his own possession. We are especially grateful to him for permission to reproduce the photographs in figures 8–10, 13 and 19–21.

Special thanks go to **Stranraer Museum, Stranraer Library, Wigtown District Council** and **Dumfries and Galloway Regional Council**. We are particularly grateful to Mr John Pickin, Curator of Stranraer Museum, his assistant, Mrs Nicky Goldsworthy, and Ms Christa Makinson; Mrs Latitia Colvin, Senior Library Assistant, and the other staff of Stranraer Library; Ms Jane Brann, Regional Archaeologist, Dumfries and Galloway Regional Council; Mr Charles Milroy and Mr Bill Marshall, respectively Area Manager and Principal Technician of the Water and Sewerage Department, Dumfries and Galloway Regional Council; Mr Robert Clark and Mr Jim Cowan, Roads and Transportation Department, Dumfries and Galloway Regional Council; and Ms Josie Barker, **Dumfries and Galloway Tourist Board**.

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To all of these we extend our thanks.

cover An early 1900s view of Stranraer from Gallowhill. Probably an etching done in Belfast from an old photograph.

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Adv MS	Advocates' Manuscript (NLS).
APS	<i>The Acts of The Parliaments of Scotland</i> , 12 vols, edd T Thomson & C Innes (Edinburgh, 1814–1875).
DES	<i>Discovery and Excavation in Scotland</i> .
ER	<i>The Exchequer Rolls of Scotland</i> , 23 vols, edd J Stuart <i>et al</i> (Edinburgh, 1878–1908).
Macfarlane, Geog Colls	Walter Macfarlane, <i>Geographical Collections Relating to Scotland</i> , ed A Mitchell, 3 vols (SHS, 1906–8).
NLS	National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh.
NSA	<i>The New Statistical Account of Scotland</i> (Edinburgh, 1845).
OSA	<i>The Statistical Account of Scotland 1791–1799</i> , ed Sir John Sinclair, New edition, edd DJ Withrington & I R Grant (Wakefield, 1973).
PPS	Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society.
PSAS	Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland.
RCRB	<i>The Records of the Convention of Royal Burghs of Scotland</i> , 7 vols, ed J D Marwick (Edinburgh, 1866–1918).
RCAHMS	The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland.
RMS	<i>The Register of the Great Seal of Scotland (Registrum Magni Sigilli Regum Scotorum)</i> , 11 vols, edd J M Thomson <i>et al</i> (Edinburgh, 1882–1914).
RPC	<i>The Register of the Privy Council of Scotland</i> , edd J H Burton <i>et al</i> (Edinburgh, 1877–).
SHS	Scottish History Society.
SRO	Scottish Record Office, Edinburgh.
TDGNHAS	<i>Transactions of the Dumfries and Galloway Natural History and Antiquarian Society</i> .

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- 1 Use the colour-coded map on the foldout at the back of the book **figure 22** and/or the **general index** to locate a particular site (normally the site of a development proposal).
- 2 If the site is in a **blue area**, any development proposal is unlikely to affect significant archaeological remains. No action is needed.
- 3 **Green areas (light and dark green)** are designated as potentially archaeologically sensitive. If the site is in a green area, it is possible that a proposal involving ground disturbance may encounter archaeological remains. Seek appropriate archaeological advice as early as possible.
- 4 **Red areas** are Scheduled Ancient Monuments or properties in the care of the Secretary of State for Scotland, and are protected by law. Consult Historic Scotland.
- 5 Use the map on p 34 **figure 15** to determine into which area of the burgh the site falls (one of Areas 1–3), and turn to the relevant area in the **area by area assessment** for a fuller account (*see* pp 35–50).
- 6 Use the **general index** and, if appropriate, the listing of **street names** (p 65–8) for rapid access to information specific to a site, street or named feature of the town.

step 1

As a working manual, the first point of reference is the colour-coded map on the foldout at the back of the book **figure 22**.

The **red areas** are **protected by law**. All applications for planning consent must be referred to Historic Scotland acting for the Secretary of State in terms of Section 15(j)(v) of the Town and Country Planning (General Development Procedure) (Scotland) Order 1992. All enquiries regarding prospective development proposals in red areas should be referred to Historic Scotland for advice at as early a stage as possible.

The **green areas (light and dark green)** are **potentially archaeologically sensitive** and may retain significant sub-surface archaeological information. Consultation should take place with the local authority Archaeologist, where any development proposal or enquiry involving ground disturbance is being considered, including car parks, road schemes, environmental improvements, landscaping and drainage schemes, as well as the usual range of development and re-development proposals in built-up areas. There is no necessity for a consultation where ground disturbance is not in prospect, such as applications for change of use of a building. If in doubt whether consultation is necessary, please refer to the local authority Archaeologist. It is important to note that sub-surface disturbance within historic standing buildings may also affect archaeological remains, and that some standing buildings may retain archaeological features within their structures. Please seek advice as required.

The **blue areas** denote those parts of the historic burgh which **may be archaeologically sterile** and where archaeological consultation is probably not necessary. In practice, *there is rarely a hard dividing line between the green and the blue areas*. If in any doubt, check the account of the relevant area in the **area by area assessment** (*see* step 2), and seek archaeological advice as appropriate.

step 2

In this new series of burgh surveys, each survey has been organised locationally, in order to assist speedy consultation on any proposed development site. In the case of Stranraer, the

historic core of the town has been divided into three arbitrary areas, Areas 1–3, which are shown on the plan on p 34 **figure 15**. The second step for the user, then, is to consult this plan and determine into which area a specific enquiry falls.

step 3

Each area is assessed individually in the **area by area assessment** (pp 35–50). The commentary for each area is prefaced with a detailed plan of that area. Archaeological, historical, geographical and geological factors of particular relevance to the area are all discussed, and an assessment of the archaeological potential is made. For ease of reference, even if a dividing line between areas is shown as the middle of a street, discussion of the area includes any elements within the street up to the opposite frontage. The importance of an integrated approach to the historical and archaeological information is implicit in the design of this report: the history and archaeology are presented together on each page rather than consecutively.

This integrated, area-based approach has involved some repetition of information in the area by area assessment, in order that users are not required to cross-reference more than necessary when dealing with a specific enquiry. Although such repetition would not be normal in a work of interest to the general public, it was felt that it would be permissible here in order to facilitate the work of primary users: local authority planners and other curators of the archaeological resource.

historic standing buildings

historic buildings reinforces the above sections by providing basic historical and architectural information about the historic standing buildings of the town; where relevant, it also provides the area location and an assessment of the archaeological potential of specific buildings. *It should always be borne in mind that historic standing buildings may also contain archaeological evidence, such as remains sealed beneath their floors and/or early features within their structures concealed by later works.*

objectives for future fieldwork and research

Any report of this nature cannot be definitive. During its preparation, a series of archaeological and historical objectives for future fieldwork and research have been identified; these are listed at pp 59–60. They will be of particular interest to urban historians and archaeologists, and to those responsible for management of the archaeological resource in historic Stranraer.

referencing

The report contains a comprehensive **general index** as well as a listing of **street names** giving basic historical information and, where relevant, area location. A **bibliography** and a **glossary** of technical terms have also been included.

The data accumulated during preparation of this survey and draft copies of the completed work, as well as all unpublished reports of any small-scale excavations and watching briefs, are housed in the **National Monuments Record**, John Sinclair House, 16 Bernard Terrace, Edinburgh EH8 9NX, telephone 0131 662 1456, facsimile 0131 662 1477 / 1499.

full reference to this report

Torrie, E P Dennison and Coleman, R 1995 *Historic Stranraer: the archaeological implications of development*, published by Historic Scotland in association with Scottish Cultural Press, Aberdeen. (Scottish Burgh Survey 1995).

the Scottish burgh survey

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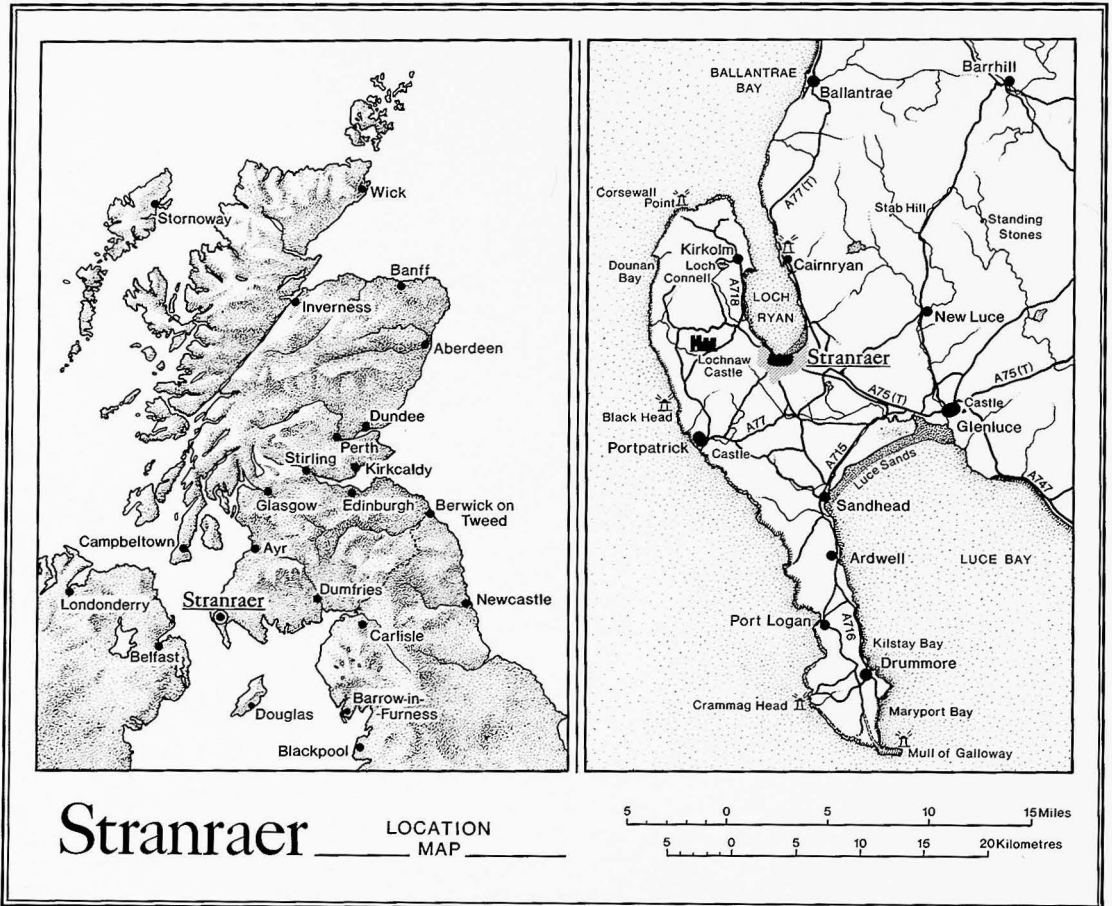


figure 1
Location of Stranraer

The royal burgh of Stranraer lies sheltered at the south end of Loch Ryan and at the north end of a narrow isthmus that separates the Rhins of Galloway from the rest of the mainland **figure 1**. Despite its location in the most south-westerly corner of Scotland, it retains its importance today as the commercial port offering the shortest sea-crossing between Britain and Ireland. Formerly part of Wigtownshire, Stranraer now lies within Galloway, which encompasses the old districts of Wigtownshire and the Stewartry of Kirkcudbright, and stretches from the Mull of Galloway in the west to the River Nith at Dumfries in the east.

Wigtownshire, or Wigtown District, is Scotland's most southerly district, bounded in the north by Ayrshire and by the Stewartry of Kirkcudbright to the east. It juts into the North Channel, which separates the Irish Sea from the southern approaches to the Firth of Clyde, and is deeply indented by Loch Ryan, and Luce and Wigtown Bays.

Until the coming of the railways, sea links and river access were extremely important for Galloway's communications. Ireland, the Isle of Man and the north-western coast of England lie scarcely 32 km away, and the Welsh coast only a little further **figure 4**. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it was possible to travel directly from Kirkcudbright or Stranraer to Peel in the Isle of Man, or on to Denbigh, Caernarvon and Anglesey in Wales. Galloway's seamen were also trading extensively along the Irish coast, and in particular with Dublin, Down, Antrim, Derry and Donegal. From a historical perspective, it seems more profitable to regard Galloway as an intrinsic part of the Irish Sea province, in terms of economic, political and demographic links, rather than as a distant corner of Scotland **figure 4**.¹

Inland, the scenery is as varied as the coastline. Rolling green pasture-land predominates in the Rhins in the west. In the south-east of the district lies the Machar, a stretch of low-lying coastal land. This well-ordered farmland gives way to moorland in the north, along the Ayrshire border. The Galloway hills, at the western end of the Southern Uplands, begin a short distance north-east of the River Cree. Here the Merrick, the highest peak in southern Scotland, rises to 843 m above sea level. Much of the Galloway Forest Park, some 100,000 acres in size, lies within this area, as do Lochs Trool and Dee.

In medieval times, the baronial burgh of Innermessan lay a few kilometres to the north-east along the shoreline of Loch Ryan, while the rival burgh of Wigtown lay some 37 km to the south-east. The early ecclesiastical centre of Whithorn, where archaeological excavations have been taking place since 1986, is some 15 km south of Wigtown. Here, archaeologists have established a sequence of settlement dating from the fifth century AD to the present day (*see p 13–14*).²

geology

Tectonic movements along two major dislocations of the earth's crust, the Southern Uplands Fault and the Highland Boundary Fault, have created three principal structural and physiographic divisions: the Highlands, the Midland Valley and the Southern Uplands.³ Stranraer lies in the Southern Uplands, to the south of the Midland Valley. The northern limit of this division is the Southern Uplands Fault, which lies parallel to the Highland Boundary Fault. This massive fracture in the earth's crust, which occurred around 408 million years ago, extends from Northern Ireland, cuts across the north of Wigtownshire at Glen App and continues across Scotland to Dunbar on the east coast.

Much of the topographic detail of the region reflects events that took place millions of years ago. The ancient structure of the bedrock still provides the bones of the landscape which has since been both sculpted and fleshed out by the geomorphological processes of the Ice Age and, more recently, by changes in sea-level.⁴

In western Galloway, Luce Bay and Loch Ryan appear to have been eroded into a basin of Permian sandstone, dating from around 250 million years ago. This basin is closed and shallow at its northern end, but deepens towards its southern end, probably reaching its maximum depth beneath Luce Bay.⁵

Numerous glaciations over the past two million years have reworked the landscape. It is difficult to tell how far the features of glacial erosion seen in Galloway are the product of the last major period of glaciation, or of former phases. Between 20,000 and 18,000 years ago, the whole of the Scottish mainland was buried by an ice sheet. This retreated in stages, and Galloway may have become ice-free by about 12,000 years BC or soon after. But between 11,000 and 10,000 years ago there was a sharp cold spell and many valley glaciers developed in the Scottish Highlands. One glacier, which pushed into the Lowlands from where Loch Lomond now lies, has given its name to this stage: the 'Loch Lomond readvance'. The general effect of this readvance on the present landscape of Galloway may have been limited, but it confirms that Ice Age conditions prevailed in Galloway as recently as about 8,000 BC when, elsewhere in the world, various peoples were well on the road to the domestication of plants and animals—and what is usually considered the roots of civilisation.⁶

post-glacial environment

A complex interplay of changing land and sea levels following the last period of glaciation has left a lasting and dramatic impression on the coastline of Scotland, and in particular on the Galloway coast. This period is also contemporary with the Mesolithic settlement of the area around Stranraer, represented by the discovery of tens of thousands of flint tools and waste from sites along the old shoreline.

When the last ice left the region, world sea level was low because of the amount of water still locked up in glaciers elsewhere. The land level, however, was also lower than at present, because of the weight of the ice on the land during previous glacial episodes. For several millennia, a race ensued between the rising world ocean level, caused by melting glaciers elsewhere, and the rising land. Sometimes the ocean won, and there were extensive inundations of Galloway's coastal margins; at other times the land drew clear, leaving raised beaches exposed above the contemporary tideline. Although ocean levels tended to be uniform from place to place, the land-level movements varied. As a result, land-level changes vary not only between Galloway and other parts of Scotland, but also along the length of the Solway.⁷

These changes of level had major topographic implications. Raised beach deposits can be traced across the isthmus between Luce Bay and Loch Ryan, showing that the Rhins of Galloway were cut off from the mainland in late glacial and early post-glacial times. Former shoreline remnants on the Rhins themselves suggest that they sometimes showed only as a string of islets. As the area repeatedly emerged from the sea, stretches of sandy seabed were exposed, allowing coastal dunes to build up. Those around Luce Bay surpass 15 m in height, and sand-blows can reveal Mesolithic sites.⁸ The main post-glacial transgression did not finish in west Galloway until around 3,000 BC.⁹ This demonstrates that changes in the coastline, and in the environment of early settlement sites, continued after the end of the Mesolithic period and well into the Neolithic.

climate and land use

The combination of generally higher rainfall and heavy clay soils has restricted improved land in Galloway to below 150 m above sea-level; and often three-quarters of that 'improved' land is under permanent grass, even by the coast. Much of the hill land has been turned over to forestry rather than grazing, because high rainfall and humidity favour peat growth, resulting in poor grazing.¹⁰

The oceanic influence on Galloway's climate means that cereal crops can be grown only at lower altitudes than in eastern Scotland, despite milder winters. The weather coming off the Atlantic produces high rainfall and persistent cloud cover, which inhibits evaporation and maintains the temperature. This in turn produces mild winters when, unfortunately, little crop growth occurs. By contrast, in summer, the oceanic effect of the Atlantic inhibits the increase in summer temperatures required for plant growth and ripening.¹¹



figure 2

Stranraer from the air
1988
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MOD

local economy

Wigtownshire generally lacked the mineral deposits that fuelled the Industrial Revolution, but Stranraer has reaped modest rewards from its geological history. Locally, gravel and clay for tile and brick making, are extracted commercially. Agriculture, however, always was and still remains the mainstay of the local economy.

The mild climate is not conducive to arable farming, which is largely confined here to barley, grown for animal feed; however, it is well suited to the growing of grass. Consequently, good lowland pasture is devoted to the fattening of stock and dairy farming. Forestry has also become an important industry since the 1940s.¹²

In the days of sail, Portpatrick had been the usual option for a direct Galloway–Ulster crossing, but, as the wreckage of its outer harbour shows, it is vulnerable to westerly gales (*see* p 23). Stranraer, sheltered within Loch Ryan, took over its role as the main port of the area with the coming of the Irish steam packet and ferry service in 1872 (*see* p 38).¹³

In 1991 Stena/SeaLink Line carried 1.3 million passengers and 410,000 vehicles from Stranraer to Larne. In the same year, P&O, which operates from Cairnryan (immediately north of Stranraer **figure 1**), took 450,000 vehicles and one million passengers. In 1992,

Sea Cat Service (Sea Containers Ferries, Scotland Ltd.) began a new service between Stranraer and Belfast.¹⁴

topography and the physical setting of the burgh **figures 2 & 3**

The relationship between the local topography and the morphology of the late medieval burgh is important for this study. Firstly, it highlights the impact of the physical environment on first settlement, and the constraints it imposed on the subsequent development of the burgh. Secondly, it may help to pinpoint the original nucleus of settlement.

The burgh of Stranraer is situated on a shallow slope northwards down to the shore of Loch Ryan, and much of the town lies between 5 m and 10 m OD. The main street, High Street/George Street/Charlotte Street, curves gently around the shore and widens out considerably at the junction of Queen Street and Church Street. The second main street, Sun Street/Bridge Street/Hanover Street, runs more or less parallel to the High Street but its alignment is more erratic. Its twists and turns perhaps reflect its later date in the development of the burgh; originally, it marked the end of the rigs extending south from the High Street, the line of which was later developed as a street **figure 2**.

The streets that extend northwards from the High Street—King Street, Queen Street, Princes Street and North Strand Street—slope gently down to Fisher Street, which marked the line of the medieval waterfront. Whether any associated structures existed before land reclamation extended the harbour northwards, in and after the late nineteenth century, is uncertain.

The street pattern in Stranraer does not generally respect the local topography; indeed, particularly in the south-west, it completely ignores the natural contours. Here, the slope rises dramatically from around 7 m OD at the junction of Queen Street and Church Street, to around 20 m OD at the corner of Sun Street and Back Rampart. This makes the blocks of properties defined by Back Rampart, King Street and the High Street down to the harbour, and the western end of Sun Street and High Street, the highest in the burgh (*see area 3*: pp 45–50). As a result, and to compensate for the slope, there has been much terracing, particularly between the High Street frontage and Sun Street at the western end of the burgh. This slope must have limited the early development of the burgh (*see figure 3*).

The alignment of most streets is fairly uniform. King Street, Queen Street, Princes Street and Church Street give the impression of a carefully laid-out burgh, rather than one which had developed gradually over the centuries. Two streets, however, stand out from the rest, retaining some of their original character: Charlotte Street/George Street and North and South Strand Streets. The burgh is thought to have developed from two separate settlements either side of North/South Strand Streets.¹⁵ These two streets, in fact, marked the line of a natural burn (Town Burn) which flowed through the burgh and has now been partly culverted and, in places, diverted.¹⁶ The curious ‘kinked’ alignment of Charlotte Street/George Street suggests that it developed gradually, as the settlement expanded.

To the south of the burgh, the Town Burn has two separate branches, which join up around Hanover Square before flowing down South Strand Street and on into Loch Ryan. A second burn, the Black Stank/Bishop Burn, which is predominantly an open ditch, skirts around the south-east corner of the burgh. Both the Town Burn and the Black Stank were originally fed from small reservoirs at the south end of the town (Ochtrellure and Clashmahew reservoirs respectively), both of which have since been filled in **figure 3**.

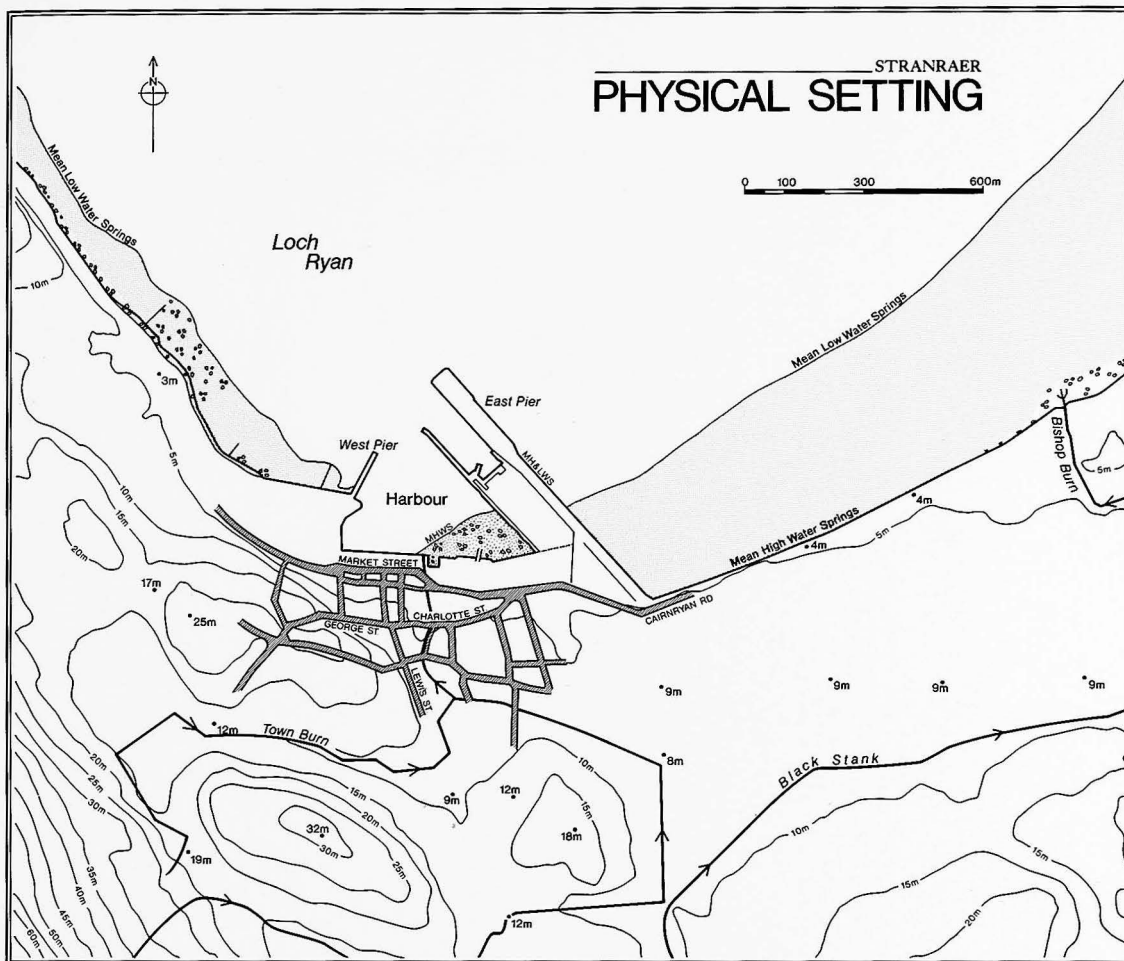


figure 3

The physical setting of Stranraer

notes

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| <p>1 I A Morrison, 'Galloway: locality and landscape evolution', in R Oram & G P Stell (edd), <i>Galloway: Land and Lordship</i> (Edinburgh, 1991), 3.</p> <p>2 <i>Wigtown District Guide</i> (Edinburgh, 1993), <i>passim</i>.</p> <p>3 Definitions after J B Sissons, <i>The Geomorphology of the British Isles: Scotland</i> (London, 1976).</p> <p>4 Morrison, 'Galloway', 5.</p> <p>5 G Y Craig, 'Permian and Triassic', in G Y Craig (ed), <i>The Geology of Scotland</i> (Edinburgh, 1965), 385-400.</p> <p>6 Morrison, 'Galloway', 9.</p> <p>7 <i>Ibid</i>, 11.</p> <p>8 <i>Ibid</i>, 12-13.</p> | <p>9 G Jardine, 'Holocene raised coastal sediments and former shorelines in Dumfriesshire and eastern Galloway', <i>TDCNHAS</i>, 3rd ser, cv (1980), 1-59.</p> <p>10 Morrison, 'Galloway', 14.</p> <p>11 <i>Ibid</i>, 14.</p> <p>12 <i>Wigtown District Guide</i>, <i>passim</i>.</p> <p>13 Morrison, 'Galloway', 4.</p> <p>14 <i>Wigtown District Guide</i>, <i>passim</i>.</p> <p>15 G Stell, 'Urban buildings', in M Lynch <i>et al</i> (edd), <i>The Scottish Medieval Town</i> (Edinburgh, 1988), 61.</p> <p>16 We are indebted to Bill Marshall, Water and Sewerage Department, Dumfries and Galloway Regional Council, Stranraer, for this information.</p> |
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archaeological and historical background

pp 11–32

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Little archaeological fieldwork has been undertaken within the historic core of Stranraer and few stray finds have previously been reported. However, since a number of prehistoric, early Christian and medieval finds have been recorded from a small area around the burgh, an introduction to the early archaeology of the area has been included here—in order to place these finds in context and to provide a broader framework within which to study the origins of the medieval burgh. A gazetteer of all previous work and chance finds from the burgh and its environs is included at pp 61–4.

prehistory

It was against the background of complex climatic fluctuations, described earlier in this survey (*see* pp 5–6), that the earliest human settlement of Scotland took place, around 7,000 BC. At this time, during the Mesolithic period (literally meaning Middle Stone Age), much of Scotland was covered in dense woodland, which supported a rich variety of game, particularly red deer.

Few settlements are known in Scotland from this period, but those that have been identified cluster along the coastline and river banks. These communities exploited marine resources, such as fish and shellfish, and followed the herds of woodland game through the seasons, while supplementing their diet with wild plants and berries. This semi-nomadic existence has left little trace in the archaeological record, although the shell midden exposed at the south end of the town, in the vicinity of Edinburgh Road (p 61), may be food debris that was collected and discarded along the post-glacial raised beach. The communities' most important natural resource, flint, does survive; thousands of flints have been found in the Stranraer area, with a particular concentration to the south and south-east of the town. These comprise a range of different types of tools such as scrapers, blades, microliths and microburins, as well as the waste products of tool-making. These tools were used in hunting and in the cutting and preparation of meat.

Changes in the environment, including an improvement in soil conditions, together with ideas introduced from continental Europe around 3,500 BC, allowed the transition from a hunter-gatherer society to a more settled existence, based on farming. Chance finds from around Stranraer include several stone axes. Although some of these may have been prestige goods, of social value to the owner, some may have been more utilitarian, used in the clearance of land for agriculture. Again, few traces of these settlements survive, but the landscape of Galloway still bears testament to their presence, in the form of stone circles and burial mounds.

Nowhere is ritual more strongly evident in the lives of these early farming groups than in their treatment of the dead and the arrangements made for burial. Amongst the earliest evidence for burial rites are small monumental tombs, often stone-built in western parts of Britain, but elsewhere constructed of wood and turf. There is considerable regional variation in the types and styles of these monuments, no doubt reflecting regional traditions and, perhaps, the origins of the peoples who built and used them.¹

Two chambered cairns at Mid Gleniron (NX 187 611), near Glenluce, provide good examples of the burial tradition in this area. Both monuments were built as simple, rectangular burial chambers enclosed in small circular cairns of probable early Neolithic date. Later, these were incorporated beneath larger wedge-shaped mounds with curved façades, and further passages were added. These changes in tomb design represent not only the introduction of new architectural ideas, but may also reflect new forms of ritual behaviour in the treatment of the dead.² Evidence of fires having been lit in front of some façades suggests that the area just outside the entrances to the tombs had become a focus for ritual, perhaps with elaborate ceremonies being performed there to commemorate the ancestors.

By about 2,500 BC, changes in society were taking place. The tradition of monumental tombs and the cult of ancestors declined and, in its stead, came other kinds of monuments, most of them no less enigmatic, such as the stone circles and standing stones of the late Neolithic and Bronze Age periods. These have excited a range of mathematical and

astronomical interpretations and clearly incorporated in their design an awareness of the rising and setting of the sun and moon.³ The stone circle at Torhousekie (NX 383 565), near Wigtown, with its nineteen granite boulders graded in height towards the larger stones in the south-east, is one of the best preserved sites of its kind in Britain.

Over time, there was a trend away from the sometimes large numbers of burials contained in earlier monumental tombs, and towards a tradition of single burials. At the Mid Gleniron I chambered cairn for instance, nine cremations in cinerary urns had been inserted into its south-eastern flank, showing that the cairn had subsequently been used in Bronze Age times. Bronze Age burials often contained objects or grave goods, placed in the grave by relatives or others taking part in the funeral ceremony, perhaps intended for use by the dead person in the afterlife. The grave goods have also been interpreted as reflecting the status of the individual within the overall social hierarchy. A cremation burial discovered at Sandmill Farm (NX 0846 6179), only a few kilometres north-east of Stranraer, provides a good example: here, the ashes were contained in an upturned urn set into a burial pit, while the grave goods included a stone battle axe, the leaf-shaped blade of a bronze razor, three whetstones and a fragment of a bone pin.⁴

The end of the Bronze Age, around 600 BC, marked a period of considerable change, not only in technology but also in society itself. Iron tools and, increasingly, weapons begin to appear in the archaeological record. Despite the abundance of evidence for monuments and rich burials in the Neolithic and Bronze Age, knowledge of the subsistence base which supported these early societies, and the settlements in which they lived, is rather poor.⁵ By the late Bronze Age and early Iron Age, however, the position is reversed and settlements begin to dominate the archaeological landscape. Numerous fortified settlements appear, ranging from large hillforts to enclosed villages and isolated single family dwellings. Although other, less defensive types of settlements also existed, the apparent preference for fortified dwellings seems generally to reflect the emergence of a more competitive society—one which perhaps competed for natural resources as well as territory—and a movement away from the large community-based monuments of the second and third millennia BC, to settlement types indicative of more tribal divisions.⁶

There are a number of hillforts to be seen in Wigtownshire, most occupying rocky promontories overlooking the coast. The largest and best-preserved promontory fort in western Galloway is 'Kemp's Walk' fort (NW 975 598) with its triple ramparts and intermediate ditches. Another fine example can be seen at Caspin (NX 005 733) near Kirkcolm; while Cairnpat (NX 044 564), near Stranraer, is an inland fort. The palisaded enclosure, discovered a few miles to the east of Stranraer (NX 0975 6006) by aerial photographic survey, may also date from this period.

the Roman period

It was this more fragmented society which the Romans encountered in the first century AD. According to Ptolemy, the classical geographer writing in the second century AD, Wigtownshire was then in the domain of the Novantae, the tribe which occupied much of what is now Dumfries and Galloway, although where their area of influence met or overlapped with those of the Selgovae and Brigantes east of the Nith is not clear.⁷ Ptolemy also mentioned a place named Rerigionium on or near Loch Ryan.⁸ This place may have been at or near the present-day site of Stranraer, but it remains uncertain whether Rerigionium was a Roman fort or camp, or a native settlement. The Romans therefore had both maritime and cartographic knowledge of Loch Ryan, but physical proof of their presence is so far rather sparse. Only a small number of Roman sites have been attested this far west in Scotland: forts at Dalswinton (NX 93 84) and Glenloch (NX 73 64) in the Nith and Dee valleys respectively; and, west of the Dee, a fortlet at Gatehouse of Fleet (NX 59 57). The forts at Dalswinton and Glenloch are dateable to the first phase of military campaigns undertaken in Scotland by the Romans, under Agricola, during the Flavian period (late first century AD). The fortlet at Gatehouse of Fleet is also Flavian in date, and probably attributable to Agricola.

A road must have connected these sites, penetrating the southern borders of the Novantae and probably making for a port at or near Stranraer. Agricola's army certainly reached the south-western extremity of Galloway which faces Ireland, and he himself thought that Ireland could easily be conquered. He had discovered that local merchants traded along the Irish coast and were familiar with the harbours and approaches there. He had also received a fugitive Irish prince, useful in the event of a military campaign. If he made recommendations to Rome, however, they were turned down in favour of a further advance northwards from the Forth–Clyde line.⁹

Whether this line of forts, and the road connecting them, was heading for Stranraer may soon be confirmed, as new sites are being discovered every year by aerial photography. Recent surveys, as yet unpublished, have identified the presence of Roman sites immediately south of Stranraer.¹⁰

the early Christian and Viking periods

The origins of Christianity in Scotland lie in Galloway, and may even pre-date the arrival of the Rome-trained missionary and native Briton, Bishop Nynia (better known as St Ninian), probably in the first half of the fifth century AD. Ninian's building of a white church, *Ad Candida Casa* according to Bede, suggests that a settled Christian community was already in existence in the area when he was appointed. The precise location of this white-plastered, possibly lime-mortared church is not known, although Whithorn is the obvious candidate.¹¹ St Ninian's Cave (NX 422 359) was in use as early as the eighth century on the evidence of incised crosses adorning the rock surfaces, by which time Galloway was under Northumbrian control. Nineteenth-century excavations in the cave also produced at least eleven, loose carved stones of eleventh-century or earlier date. Tradition suggests that the cave was St Ninian's devotional retreat in the fifth century. Indisputable evidence of very early Christian activity in the area is found in the discovery of two fifth-century inscribed stones at Kirkmadrine (NX 080 483) and one at Whithorn—the earliest known Christian memorials in Scotland. A collection of carved stones from Kirkmadrine dating from the fifth to twelfth centuries indicates that here was an early Christian cemetery of some importance—only about 10 km south of present-day Stranraer. Altogether, about 170 pieces of pre-Norman sculpture have been recorded from Galloway over the last hundred years, with about 130 of them, drawn from some forty separate sites, coming from Wigtownshire.¹²

Slightly further afield, the Ruthwell Cross (NY 100 682), with its fantastic carvings depicting coherent theological themes in words and pictures, is the outstanding symbol of a period of Anglian domination of the area which probably lasted from the early eighth to early tenth centuries. The Cross itself probably dates from the first half of the eighth century and illustrates the ascendancy of Northumbrian Christianity at that time.¹³ Nearby, recent excavations at the Anglian monastery of Hoddom (NY 166 726), a site closely associated with St Kentigern and long recognised as a rich source of Anglian and later sculpture, have revealed the full extent of this wealthy monastery, the careful organisation of a range of building types and the wide diversity of activities carried out within the monastic site.¹⁴

There is a striking correspondence in the distribution of Northumbrian and Scandinavian placenames in Galloway, indicating an enduring pattern of territorial organisation and settlement in the pre-medieval period. Although Vikings were raiding along the west coast of Scotland from the end of the eighth century onwards, archaeological evidence of their impact on Galloway remains somewhat elusive.¹⁵ Placename evidence suggests that Scandinavian settlement of south-west Scotland occurred at around the end of the ninth century, but it was concentrated in eastern Dumfriesshire, with smaller groupings only around Kirkcudbright and Whithorn. The best evidence for Viking Galloway comes from Whithorn, where Scandinavian type finds have been recovered in excavated levels dating to about AD 850–1000, testifying to contacts, although not demonstrably to the presence of Scandinavian settlers. Some of the

later buildings at Whithorn, however, dating to around AD 1000–1150, bear a marked resemblance to contemporary houses in Viking Dublin. By the eleventh century, Whithorn was a trading post, processing a limited range of locally produced raw materials, and part of a trading network linking the lands around the Irish Sea with the main Scandinavian seaways.¹⁶ Other archaeological evidence for Viking Galloway is scant indeed, supplemented only by a few references in documentary sources such as the *Chronicle of Man* and *Orkneyinga Saga*.

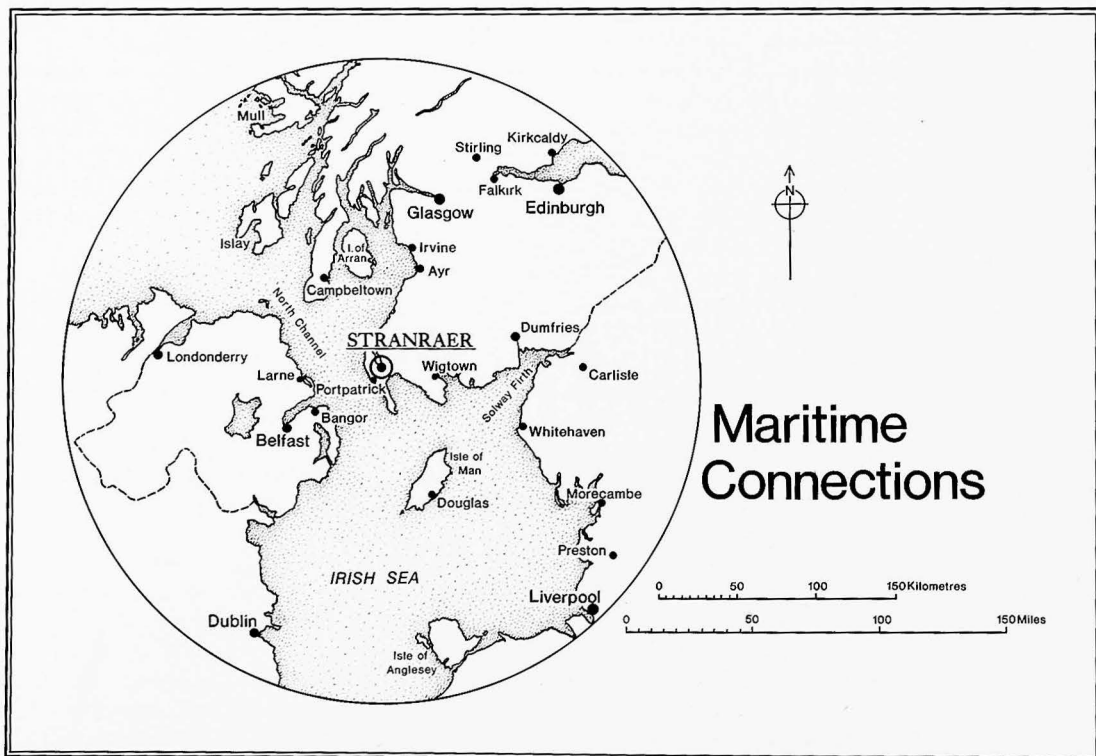
There is much debate about the enigmatic *Gall-Gaidhil* or ‘foreign Gaels’ and their relationship to the Vikings.¹⁷ These were reputed by the ninth century at least to have been mercenaries of mixed descent, fighting at sea or on land, and fickle in their loyalties. More recently, it has been argued that *Gall-Gaidhil* was the Irish name for the people of Galloway—Gaelic speakers by the eleventh century and ‘foreigners’ from an Irish perspective. By the twelfth century, Galloway must have been regarded as an area *par excellence* for people of mixed blood, which would explain why the name *Gall-Gaidhil* might gradually have become reserved for the inhabitants of that area.

By the mid thirteenth century, Whithorn had declined in importance, perhaps reflecting the final subjugation of Galloway to the Scottish Crown in 1235 or, perhaps, the transfer of Whithorn’s status as a centre of trade to Wigtown, which became the seat of the new royal sheriff and the shire administration around the middle of the thirteenth century.¹⁸

the medieval and modern periods

The origin of the placename ‘Stranraer’ is uncertain. Andrew Symson, writing in 1684, suggested that since there was a ‘bourn’ or ‘strand’ running through the centre of settlement, ‘perhaps the town should be spell’d Strandrawer’.¹⁹ Local tradition supports this to some extent, saying that ‘Strand-ravr’ meant the ‘rav’ or row of dwellings on the strand.²⁰

figure 4
Maritime
connections



The first firm documentary evidence for Stranraer comes in the early fourteenth century when the lands of 'Stranreuer' were held by Fergus de Mandeville.²¹ By 1513/14 they were in the possession of Thomas McDowell, but McDowell control was disputed by a number of families from 1525 until, ultimately, the small settlement lying west of a burn flowing into Loch Ryan passed to Ninian Adair in 1591 or 1592.²² The Adairs of Kinhilt were a family of Irish origin who had arrived in Scotland in the thirteenth century. They were holding land in Wigtownshire by the early 1300s, with their main base near Portpatrick; the ruined castle of Dunskey was part of their demesne.²³ Soon they were extending their control both southwards to Drummore and northwards to the Inch, and in 1484 they acquired lands to the east of the burn running northwards into Loch Ryan. Here, a sister of Bishop Adair of Kinhilt founded a chapel, dedicated to St John and possibly replacing an older structure. This area then became known as either the 'clachan of St John' or 'Chapel',²⁴ and it was here that the Adairs built for themselves, some time around 1520, an L-shaped tower-house or castle, to function, in all probability, as a family home and an administrative centre for their estates. It is clear that the two small settlements, Stranraer and Chapel, were distinct, albeit both largely under the control of the same feudal lord. Interestingly, the discovery of a boat lying across this burn is indicative of settlement from earlier times (see pp 40–2 and figure 5).

In the autumn of 1595 Ninian Adair was given permission by King James VI to create a burgh on the land within his jurisdiction, and the 'clachan' of Stranraer became a free burgh of barony, with the right to have a provost, treasurer, dean of guild, bailies, councillors and other officers, and burgesses, and to have its own burgh court. Two important benefits of burgh status followed: the burgesses were granted the privilege of 'pak' and 'peill', buying and selling, with permission to erect a tolbooth and a market cross; and they received the right to raise customs on both overland and sea-borne trade within their jurisdiction.²⁵ This latter concession was reinforced in the March of the following year when the king granted the burgh the sole monopoly of trade within a radius of four miles, since the nearest royal burgh lay 'twenty-four miles away [sic]'; this was Wigtown, which was, in fact, twenty-six miles (42 km) distant.²⁶

Beneficial as these concessions were for Stranraer, they were opposed by neighbouring royal burghs, in particular Wigtown, as it was felt that the bestowal of such rights on Stranraer impinged on their traditional mercantile monopolies. By July 1596 the Wigtown representative at the Convention of Royal Burghs was complaining about the elevation of the 'village' of Stranraer into a free burgh.²⁷ Three years later, the Convention forbade all free burghs and their burgesses to acknowledge newly-erected burghs of barony. In particular, Stranraer and Maybole were encroaching on the liberties of Wigtown and Ayr respectively. Their inhabitants were to be treated as unfree persons, and trade with them was forbidden on pain of a fine of £20.²⁸

Stranraer's early burgh court book²⁹ and the first notaries' protocol books³⁰ suggest that, in spite of external opposition, the fledgling burgh was soon spreading its wings. The most significant secular building in any burgh was the tolbooth, which was the physical embodiment of a burgh's privileges and status. It was here that the burgh court met, market dues were collected, town weights were safeguarded and the gaol was housed. Although the first definite reference to Stranraer's tolbooth is in October 1597, a torn folio in the first burgh court book indicates that a burgh court was held 'in p...' some time before October 1596. Doubtless, this read '*in pretorio*'—in the tolbooth. Within less than a year of its foundation the little burgh had its burgh court and municipal focal point established and functioning.

Ninian Adair acted as provost and appointed the bailies and other officers—the treasurer, common clerk, dean of guild and lesser officials. He also reserved to himself the right to appoint the burgh council and admit burgesses. Rules and regulations for the smooth running of the burgh were also laid down by Adair. By October 1596, for example, he decreed that the weights and measures of the burgh were to be the same as those of Wigtown, but were to bear his arms. On the same occasion, he also decreed, perhaps in an attempt to encourage community spirit, that if an indweller in Stranraer



archeological and historical background

figure 5
Map from J Blaeu's
Gallowidia, 1654
National Library

Novatum From

died, all other inhabitants were to attend the funeral. He added, however, that if the deceased was 'of mein estait' merely to send a servant would suffice.³¹ The burgh customs were put up for public roup at the tolbooth door, as were the revenues from the tron or public weighbeam, and in 1597 the highest bid for the land customs was 24 merks 6s 8d. The sea customs and water bailiary were rouped for 5 merks. It would seem that these were somewhat underbid, for the following year the land customs were rouped for 41 merks and the sea and anchorage customs for 11 merks. The commodities on which customs were raised show that Stranraer was dealing largely with raw agricultural produce—sheep, lambs, cows, oxen, horses, bacon, beef, wool, hemp, skins, butter and cheese, and oats and meal brought in by sea—as well as fish, in particular herring. Dressed and rough timber, some from Ireland, also passed through Stranraer's market.³²

Stranraer's crafts were not solely tied to agricultural produce or fish, for the first burgh court book refers to the occupations of tailor, ostler, cordiner (leather-worker), weaver, cooper, merchant and mariner among the burghess population. There were also two notaries from the outset and a schoolmaster by 1614.³³ Not all new burghesses were already inhabitants of Stranraer when they received the privilege. Doubtless, the lure of mercantile privileges brought in folk from the surrounding countryside. This was also in the burgh superior's interest, as it encouraged a thriving commerce. By October 1598 it was clear, however, that some burghesses were not taking up their full responsibilities and the Council insisted that all Stranraer burghesses must 'cum and mak thair residence thairin' or at least have their booths set up in the town before the next Whitsun on pain of loss of burghess-ship. This order was repeated in December of the following year. In the event, there is record of only one burghess being deprived for failure to meet this stipulation, in October 1600.³⁴ Evasion continued to some extent: Gilbert Mure in 1609 took an obligation, under the pain of £100 fine, that he would cease to practise 'merchandrice' unless he made himself 'free', that is, took up burghess-ship, and resided in the town.³⁵

The early burgh was small, having effectively only one main street (along the line of the present George Street), with a more or less parallel narrow back lane (the present Fisher Street).³⁶ Three small vennels led from the main street to the sea, which at high spring and autumn tides, came right up to Fisher Street (*see* pp 35–6).³⁷ Although early references are to 'Stranraer' being the burgh, it is clear that Chapel was also included, burghesses being infeft in tenements to the east of the burn.³⁸ The records suggest that there was no attempt to regulate the sizes of burgage plots, or tofts, as was common in medieval burghs, and plot sizes varied considerably: they ranged from 'a tenement and three roods'³⁹ to a tenement of 64 ells in length and 10 ells in breadth.⁴⁰ Others mentioned were 14 ells in length and 28 ells in breadth,⁴¹ 23 ells in length and 15 ells in breadth,⁴² or merely 11 ells in length and 5 ells in breadth.⁴³ An ell might vary, according to locality, from 36 inches to 45 inches, but, whatever the standard adopted in Stranraer—and this is not known—it is evident that tofts were not of uniform size.

The focal points of the burgh were the tolbooth, the market cross and the tron, all of which stood, probably from the outset of burgh life and certainly from later in the seventeenth century, in the middle of the main street at the top of present Queen Street/Church Street. Yet the feature with the greatest visual impact was still the Adair's early sixteenth-century Castle of St John (p 56). By 1596 it had been transferred to Elizabeth Kennedy, possibly through marriage, but it retained its imposing aura, surrounded by small, unsophisticated, mainly single-storeyed, largely wooden and possibly wattle and daub, thatched homes.

Sometime between 1603 and 1609 (the records are missing for these years), Ninian Adair demitted office as provost, to be replaced by his oldest son, William.⁴⁴ The Adairs soon returned to their native Ireland, whether in disenchantment with their new burgh is unclear. Certainly, by 1617, when Stranraer was erected into a royal burgh, the Adairs were no longer provosts and the bailies were Gilbert Agnew (possibly a member of a local landed family) and Andrew McConnell.⁴⁵ The burgh was confirmed in all its privileges of a burgh of barony, with an enlarged territorial base, to include the six acres of St John's

Croft. More significantly, it was laid down that, since Stranraer was twenty-four (*sic*) miles from its nearest neighbouring burgh, Wigtown, and since it was the port of Loch Ryan 'for communication between Ireland and Scotland', it was to be a free royal burgh, with the right to be the only port on the loch.⁴⁶

This intimate relationship with Ireland long continued to be a dominant theme in Stranraer's history. Communication by water was easier than by land, and Stranraer had close physical links with Ireland, coastal south-west Scotland and north-west England, as it had from before the medieval period (*see figure 4* and p 5). As has been argued elsewhere, 'it seems more profitable to regard Galloway as less of an out-of-the-way corner of Scotland than an intrinsic part of the Irish Sea province, in terms of economic, political and demographic links'.⁴⁷ The records indicate that many of Stranraer's burgesses were of Irish origin: John Thomson, merchant, John Milvill, navigator, and William Scott, merchant and navigator, all of Donaghadee, for example, were admitted in 1689.⁴⁸ It was these links that persuaded General Monck in 1654, during his offensive against areas of Scotland hostile to the Cromwellian regime, to observe that should Scotland receive supplies from abroad, they would be likely to land at Stranraer.⁴⁹ Ten years later, when the magistrates of the burgh refused to take an oath of loyalty to Charles II, the provost had already fled to safety in Ireland.⁵⁰ Prevention of this contact with such near neighbours was probably never truly enforceable.⁵¹ Instructions to the magistrates of Stranraer in 1673, along with those of other west coast burghs, that they were to enforce the act of parliament banning import of Irish victuals, are indication of serious evasion.⁵² On occasion officialdom was obeyed: in 1685, a boat landed goods from Ireland at Stranraer and the crew was imprisoned.⁵³

Stranraer, even once it had become a royal burgh, remained out of favour with established burghs, and Wigtown continued to object to its new status.⁵⁴ It was not, in consequence, permitted to send representatives to the Convention of Royal Burghs until 1683, or to parliament until 1685,⁵⁵ when the burgh was represented by Patrick Paterson.⁵⁶ He was succeeded by Sir John Dalrymple. From 1690 the usual representative was either Sir Patrick Murray or Mr George Dalrymple.⁵⁷

There is little evidence of territorial expansion in the town during the seventeenth century. A parish church had been built in 1649, in accordance with the instructions laid down on the granting of royal burgh status, although it would seem that permission had already been granted for the erection of a kirk at Stranraer at least by 1600.⁵⁸ There has been little archaeological work to date in the town, and few stray finds are reported. Interestingly, burials were found recently during building works at the new museum (the old tolbooth). These may indicate the extent of the earlier graveyard, which stood immediately to the south, and are perhaps associated with this original mid seventeenth-century parish church of Stranraer (*see pp 48–9*). The overall impression, however, is of a small market town servicing its agricultural hinterland, although it did house a garrison of one hundred men in 1649⁵⁹ and proved a base for John Graham of Claverhouse and his troops in their pursuit of Galloway Covenanters in 1678. Tradition has it that Claverhouse stayed at the castle, which was in the hands of John Dalrymple of Stair.⁶⁰

By 1689 the town was still little more than one main street with supporting vennels, for the punishment of a petty thief was that he was to be whipped through 'the street' (singular).⁶¹ A visitor in the second half of the seventeenth century spoke of Stranraer as 'but a little town, yet it is indifferently well built; their houses are within for the most part kept neat and clean, and their meat well dress'd, by reason of their correspondence with Ireland'.⁶² Stranraer did, however, possess a public clock by 1692, when John Hunter, smith, undertook to keep it 'ane going knock' for a year at a fee of £14.⁶³ It appears also that the town was well supplied for water. Not only was there a ready source of water in the Town Burn, but Stranraer also had wells with 'good' water, one of the most noted being St John's well, which was below the high water mark. When the tide went out water 'boils up in a copious spring of excellent soft fresh water'.⁶⁴

The Hearth Tax records of 1695 indicate only sixty-nine households, and suggest that forty-four of these had merely a single hearth and that twenty-two had two hearths; but of

these latter one hearth was a kiln, three were smiddie fires and one was a furnace, so in reality there were forty-nine households with single domestic hearths. This meant that 71 per cent of the town's houses were single-hearthed, compared, for example, with 69 per cent in Linlithgow, 63 per cent in Dumfries and 58 per cent in Kirkcaldy.⁶⁵ Only two houses had three hearths, but since one of these was a kiln, there was, in fact, only one three-hearth house, owned by John Row, and eighteen with two hearths (26 per cent). There were no houses with four or more hearths. The total number of households suggests a population of about 293 persons (using a multiplier of 4.25). Although only ten people in the parish were classified as 'poor' (that is, receiving poor relief), the records show clearly that people of substance were rare in Stranraer.⁶⁶ It was said that there was only one 'good house' (the castle) in the town in the seventeenth century.⁶⁷

Thomas Tucker, a commissioner for the Cromwellian government in 1656, while commenting on Stranraer as a 'small mercate towne' with what might prove 'a pretty harbour for shelter of vessels' added that such an event was 'very seldome and rare, in respect there is not now nor ever was any trade to be heard of here'.⁶⁸ A similar dismal picture was painted by the commissioners of the Convention of Royal Burghs who reported in 1692 that Stranraer had no foreign trade and that its inland trade was 'most inconsiderable', consisting largely of the sale of goods imported from Glasgow, Ayr, Greenock and Kilmarnock; trade with Kilmarnock was limited to knives and bonnets. The town had no ships, barks or ferry boats, and only four boats once used for herring fishing; with the decline in fishing, these, too, now lay unused.⁶⁹ Stranraer's position as a local market may have been undermined by the parliamentary decision in 1669 to set up a market at Glenluce, since the markets of Wigtown and Stranraer were eighteen miles [*sic*] apart, and this was deemed too distant; they were, in fact, twenty-six miles from each other.⁷⁰ In spite of such difficulties, the town was able to take advantage of a new import: tobacco. Indeed, so available was tobacco in the town that a visitor in 1684 maintained that the Stranraer people were so addicted that they had no shame in asking for a 'chaw' from anyone.⁷¹

Confirmation of Stranraer's economic state can be found in a tax roll of 1684, in which it was assessed at 2s, compared with Edinburgh at £33 6s 8d, Dumfries at £1 13s 4d and Ayr at £1 14s 8d. Only four burghs were taxed at less than Stranraer—Inverbervie, New Galloway, Sanquhar and North Berwick, all at 1s.⁷² Nor was there any sign of recovery in the early decades of the next century. An inauspicious start was made in 1705 when the town was in such a 'low and decayed state' that the Convention of Royal Burghs voted £40 to repair its tolbooth.⁷³ Twelve years later Stranraer appealed to the Convention for a reduction in its tax assessment, since its common good was worth only £10 10s, the customs were only sufficient to pay the schoolmaster's salary and the town was 'utterly decayit, having no manner of trade either by sea or land, nor ships nor barks belonging to them'.⁷⁴ Representatives were despatched from Ayr, Whithorn and Wigtown to discover whether Stranraer was exaggerating its distress, and they reported that the claims were well founded.⁷⁵ The Convention in 1729 granted a further £20 to Stranraer for the repairing of its tolbooth and other public works.⁷⁶

There is a little evidence that Stranraer's lot was improving by the 1720s, when an assessment commented on the town's 'considerable market' held every Friday and the two annual fairs.⁷⁷ The parish minister had been inadequately endowed ever since the establishment of the parish church in 1649, and the town's lack of funds was such that it was left to the minister, Reverend Walter Laurey, in 1736, to gift a house and garden for a manse and thirty acres of land in the parish of Leswalt as a glebe.⁷⁸ When the first parish church became irreparable, it was replaced by a new one on virtually the same site in 1785, but only as a result of the generosity of Lord Stair.⁷⁹

The Council remained conscious of the need for upgrading of the fabric of the town. In 1770, a decision was taken to remove the tolbooth and tron from the centre of George Street, to relieve congestion in the main thoroughfare. The tolbooth was re-sited on the south side of George Street, where it still stands; work was completed by 1776 and it was in use the following year. The tron was placed at the top and to the side of Queen Street.⁸⁰

In 1786 a fence and gate were erected around the new church,⁸¹ and in the following year the Council decided to build a new school house,⁸² which was completed by 1788 except for the lack of adequate seating for the children.⁸³ In this same year the new burial yard or kirkyard, standing beside the new church, was divided into plots with a view to sale to recoup some of the expenses of burgh improvements.⁸⁴

The provost, bailies and councillors were aware of the major deficiency in the town—the lack of a proper harbour. Harbour works were proposed in 1777, and an appeal was made to the Convention of Royal Burghs for financial support. It was argued, with reason, that the town was in an excellent position on Loch Ryan, offering good shelter for shipping, but as ships had to anchor at some distance from the shore they suffered unduly from storms in winter. The petition also stressed that Stranraer was well situated for all manner of trade, and also for white herring fishing which had recently increased. A year later, Convention representatives reported that the cost of the proposed works would be £1,549 8s. The burgh's annual revenue, however, was only £4 4s 6d more than this sum, and all of it was earmarked for works on the courthouse and church. The Convention agreed that if the town raised the first two-thirds of the costs by public subscription it would give financial assistance.⁸⁵ Nothing came of this, and Stranraer did not have a harbour until the nineteenth century.

As well as pursuing a modest programme of civic improvement, it is clear from the Burgh Court and Town Council Minute Books that the Council kept a watchful eye on more mundane matters of public hygiene and sanitation. There are numerous references to town statutes ordering the removal of dung, ash and rubbish heaps from the thoroughfares, but the fact that these had often to be repeated suggests that they were largely ignored.⁸⁶ In 1767, an application was made to erect a tanning works. The Council discussed the water pollution it would cause, but still granted permission, possibly for commercial reasons.⁸⁷ Other offenders were, at times, successfully prosecuted for polluting the town's water supply, for example William McHarry, a dyer, in 1779.⁸⁸

Poverty was always present, and more acute distress was seldom far away. A reference to housing as 'uninhabitable' reveals a continuing problem for the burgh authorities.⁸⁹ Poverty was reflected not only in the state of some homes, but also in other measures the Council was obliged to take at times. By 1782 the authorities were expelling strangers residing in the town without a certificate. Clearly, an attempt was being made to limit calls on poor relief funds.⁹⁰ It was routine for the magistrates and Council to monitor the quality and price of essentials such as bread. In 1786 the Council brought in checks to remove malpractice after complaints that the baxters were using bad flour and making bread that was underfired and underweight; it also imprisoned one of the baxters, William Crawford, for abusive behaviour in court while the case was being heard.⁹¹

There were times, however, when emergency measures were needed. On 1 January 1767, for example, it was recorded in the Council minutes that the poor of the town were starving, mainly because meal was scarce; it was suspected that farmers were hoarding it. Constables were appointed to search for excess meal; and, in an unusual measure which hints at the severity of the famine, it was decided that all meal made from oats or barley was to be sold at the market free of customs or tax until the coming Christmas.⁹² These measures, however, were not enough. In the following March, a fund was set up, with contributions from the magistrates and wealthier members of Stranraer society, to purchase meal for the poor. By June 1768, a sale of meal for the poor was instituted.⁹³

By the last decades of the eighteenth century, more prosperous times were approaching, at least for some sections of Stranraer society. A traveller passing through Stranraer in 1760 described it as a 'small neat town', but the *Old Statistical Account* refers to 'many new houses' built in the 1770s and reports 'new houses finished in a style that would not disgrace even some ... richer and more populous towns ... rising every year'.⁹⁴ This is confirmed by the report of another visitor to the town in 1799 that Stranraer contained 'many handsome houses'.⁹⁵ It was said to have become fashionable for local gentry to have town residences in Stranraer; that of the earl of Stair may have stood across Church Street from the tolbooth, on the site of the present George Hotel.⁹⁶ These houses, however,

would have been the exception. The majority, some of which stood until the early twentieth century, were small, thatched, single-storey dwellings; the overall impression gained from the local records is of little stone bridges over the town burn, narrow thoroughfares, mostly between 11 and 14 feet (3.7 and 4.3 m) wide, and tiny wynds and closes—Jean McMaster's Close, for example, was a mere 3ft 7 ins (1 m) wide.⁹⁷

A sense that Stranraer was composed of smaller, different settlements persisted well into the eighteenth century. The expression 'Chapel of Stranraer' was often used in the records, as was 'Hillhead of Stranraer', differentiating these areas topographically, and probably psychologically, from Stranraer proper. Although the author of the *Old Statistical Account* for Stranraer felt that, by this time, 'Clayhole and Hillhead ... are so closely joined to Stranraer that they appear parts of the town', a census drawn up at the same time did not include either of these settlements, reinforcing the view of the inhabitants that they were a people apart.⁹⁸ As late as the 1870s, residents in Clayhole and Hillhead objected to paying Stranraer's rates as they considered themselves a separate settlement.⁹⁹

This census, drawn up in the 1790s, not only gives clues to the sites of the more substantial dwellings and households, but also offers a useful comparison with the Hearth Tax statistics of 1695. There were 367 (or possibly 369) households, with a total of 1,559 inhabitants mentioned by name or merely as 'servant', 'maid' or 'boy'—an average of 4.25 (or 4.23) persons per household. This was, in effect, a population increase of 532 per cent in a hundred years. Although there is no indication of hearths in the eighteenth-century census, servants are listed, which at least gives an overall impression of households of substance. Eighteen of the 367 households had resident servants—only 4.9 per cent. But in 1695 only a single household (1.4 per cent) had had three hearths. So there is firm evidence here of a growth in more substantial households, even if Stranraer was still an extremely modest town compared with urban centres such as Dumfries, Ayr or Glasgow. This becomes even more apparent when it is noted that only three households had two servants, one had three and the rest housed merely one servant or maid. If lack of servants is taken as an indication of lack of wealth, the least prosperous areas were Fisher Row and East Vennel (Princes Street), with no servants in any of its fifty-three households; the extension of Fisher Row westwards to the march of Clayhole, with no servants to twenty households; and of the 104 (or possibly 106) households that appear to lie east of the castle and Castle Alley only one household, in the Far Fay, had servants. It would seem that, in spite of population increase and spatial expansion, the traditionally desirable areas, near the market centre, remained the most prestigious. The Fay and the Far Fay had been developed, with permission for a new street in 1771 which Adam Hanna, mason, sought to build in the Chapel Fay of Stranraer.¹⁰⁰ Most of the housing in this area was probably of low quality, although three prestigious dwellings—Bellevilla House, Ann House and North West Castle (*see* pp 54–5)—were soon to be built there. Ivy House may already have been standing and is possibly the sole household in the area east of the castle likely to have had servants.¹⁰¹

Contemporaries and nineteenth-century commentators offered two main explanations for this lack of wealth. It was claimed that the town was low in manufactories, largely because industry was restricted through the high cost of fuel to the region. Peat and turf were still extensively used, but had to be carried three or four miles to the town and were of poor quality. Coal, as a result of necessary transportation, often from Ayr or Irvine, cost fourteen pence per herring barrel, which was a prohibitive price.¹⁰² The town was not without industry, however. A tack of the Earl of Stair to one Robert Maclellan in 1787, for example, refers to a newly built malt kiln on the west side of the Stranraer–Stoneykirk road.¹⁰³ Stranraer, also, along with at least six other towns in the south-west, benefited from a revival in distilling after the reduction of duty following the Napoleonic Wars. In the period 1823–6 J McKie Jnr & Co produced 12,077 gallons, compared with, for example, 8,886 gallons in Dumfries, 28,956 gallons in Bladnoch, or 40,681 from two distilleries in Langholm. In the year 1826–7 Stranraer was holding its own against the competition, with an output of 8,956 gallons, compared with Dumfries at 436 gallons, Bladnoch 9,792 gallons and 2,974 from Arnott & Co, the distillers of Langholm who had

produced 35,255 gallons in 1823–6.¹⁰⁴ The *Old Statistical Account*, however, claimed that, in spite of this home production, 24,426 gallons of whisky and other spirits were imported into Stranraer in 1790. Indeed the local minister, Reverend John Coulter, felt that there were ‘too many retailers of whisky, both licensed and unlicensed. The effects of it are the same here as everywhere else, viz, idleness, and the ruin of the health and morals of the lower sort of people’.¹⁰⁵

Another common complaint at this time was that the town was ‘oppressed with Irish vagrants, who come over in crowds’.¹⁰⁶ To others, this influx brought advantage. By the end of the eighteenth century, temporary or seasonal labour to Scotland from Ireland was channelled through Portpatrick and Stranraer.¹⁰⁷ It was even stated that ‘an advertisement upon an emergency will bring over hundreds of them [the Irish] in a few days’.¹⁰⁸ This cheap immigrant labour depressed local wage rates, bringing profits to employers, but hardship to existing workers in Stranraer.¹⁰⁹

The passenger trade with Ireland brought certain financial benefits. Stranraer had a number of large inns, including the Golden Cross and the George Hotel **figure 20** (*see* p 54). It was said of the latter that it had ‘capital accommodation for both man and beast’¹¹⁰ and the best of the hostelries were ‘crowded with people of rank waiting for a fair wind by which they might sail over to Donaghadee’.¹¹¹ It is also clear from the Council records that there was a moderate trade with Ireland throughout the eighteenth century, as there had been during the seventeenth, even during years of prohibition. It is likely that a substantial proportion of Stranraer’s exports of grain and potatoes went to Ireland; a hundred tons of potatoes were shipped there in 1791.¹¹² The Council minutes make it clear that this overseas trade at times brought hardship to Stranraer, as a result of non-payment of debts. This was, of course, not merely an Irish failing; merchants from Liverpool, masters of ships registered in Scottish ports and others also figured as regular defaulters.¹¹³

It was noted by a visitor to the town in 1799 that 28,000 yards of linen were stamped annually in Stranraer.¹¹⁴ Although flax had become ‘a favorite crop’ in the region of Stranraer by then, particularly in the Stoneykirk area,¹¹⁵ the trade in textile goods was enhanced by cloth and yarn transported between Scotland and Ireland on the passenger and cattle ferries. With the failure of much of Ireland’s domestic linen industry and yarn spinning, an exodus of semi-skilled and skilled workers to Scotland boosted the Scottish industry, including that based at Stranraer. The cattle trade was a highly specialised form of shipping enterprise, growing rapidly after the 1760s.¹¹⁶ Stranraer, along with other towns such as New Galloway, Kirkcudbright and Dumfries acted as collection points for Galloway-bred and Irish imported cattle, which were driven south along the drove roads of the Galloway hills.¹¹⁷ Tanning, it was noted in 1799, was ‘a considerable branch of business’ in Stranraer.¹¹⁸ This industry also benefited from the close contact with Ireland, hides being imported from across the water, as well as being obtained locally.¹¹⁹ Lime, imported from Whitehaven and Larne, was then used in the tanning process as well as for agriculture.¹²⁰ The Irish cattle trade remained a significant element of the Stranraer economy until the 1830s, when steamships diverted the trade directly to English and Welsh ports, such as Liverpool and Holyhead.¹²¹

It has been claimed that before the nineteenth century Stranraer, as a port, was of little consequence, its major trade being imported Irish cattle and the export of local farm produce.¹²² Some locally-produced goods, however, both imports and exports, did pass through Stranraer, if not in great bulk (*see* p 17). Trade from Stranraer went further afield than Ireland and north-west England; for example, Galloway plaiding was exported to Virginia from the town.¹²³ The *Old Statistical Account* related that ‘deals, planks and large timber’, as well as iron, passed through Stranraer from Norway, Gothenburg and other Baltic ports for both domestic use and shipbuilding.¹²⁴

Many more ships used Stranraer in the last decades of the eighteenth century. In 1764 only two vessels, of 30 and 35 tons, belonged to the town. Twenty-seven years later, the tonnage was 1,200, consisting of ships ranging from 15 to 100 tons.¹²⁵ By 1839, thirty-eight vessels were listed at Stranraer, some of which had been built in the town. Between

1791 and 1806 eight trading vessels were constructed, and in the next three years a further seven, including the trading brig *Douglas* of 120 tons. In the years immediately following the cessation of war with France, fifty-three ships were registered at Stranraer, compared with four at Portpatrick and thirty-nine at Wigtown; seven of those registered at Stranraer were involved in foreign trade, and the rest were coastal vessels.¹²⁶

Much of Stranraer's history in the nineteenth century revolves around shipping and the need to provide piers and an adequate, sheltered harbour. In 1817, a contract was drawn up between the magistrates and the community of the burgh on the one side, and Kenneth and Donald Mathieson on the other, 'for the erection or formulation of a harbour or port for vessels'.¹²⁷ This marked the beginning of major structural works, land reclamation and a physical transformation of the town, but it would bring with it crippling debts. The first stage was the building of a small west pier, completed in 1820 **figure 9**.¹²⁸ Loans of £2,000 from the Exchequer and £500 from the Convention of Royal Burghs, backed by £2,000 or so raised from private individuals and the Paisley Banking Company (see p 36), left the town financially embarrassed. Dues were imposed on those using the quay but many mariners evaded dues, either by mooring at Clayhole **figure 10** or by refusing to pay. Various solutions were attempted, such as placing a chain across the harbour entrance in 1830 to deny access to those who did not meet their dues. In spite of disputes with shipowners and lack of adequate funding, work continued on the quay, and on deepening and lengthening the harbour, over the next few decades (see pp 36–7).

In the meantime, a further radical change was underway—the construction and opening of the railway. Although Stranraer had throughout its history been mainly dependent on water transport, the main Dumfries–Portpatrick land route had always passed through the town. The impenetrability of Galloway had already been reduced by the establishment of drove routes and smugglers' trails, the Military Road (resulting from General Roy's survey of c.1750), and, in particular, the network of roads that developed after 1780 with the establishment of toll roads by the Turnpike Trusts. Stranraer, as a rival to Portpatrick, was increasingly seen as the exporting port for the Galloway region, in spite of sections of the approach roads to the town being deemed to be 'so bad, unsafe and unpracticable as totally to obstruct intercourse'.¹²⁹ A mail coach from Dumfries to Portpatrick went through Stranraer in 1805, as did that from Portpatrick to Glasgow, which had become a regular service by 1820.¹³⁰ Communications, however, were transformed by the arrival of the railway.

The first steam train arrived in Stranraer—by sea—in 1859.¹³¹ Once the railway system was fully networked in the years between 1861 and 1864, vast transformations took place.¹³² In 1861, the Railway Company advanced a loan of £20,000 for the construction of a second pier at Stranraer. In return, the Company was to receive berthage priority at the pier that the Council would build, own and maintain in return for a rental of £1,000 annually. This new easterly pier, however, proved to be so insubstantial that the Council was forced to borrow a further £2,600 for repair work, and there were fears that Stranraer would be bypassed by the reopening of the Portpatrick–Donaghadee route.

There had been rivalry between Portpatrick and Stranraer for most of the previous century. Portpatrick, although it had the disadvantage of being on the wind-battered west coast, was closer to Ireland. Stranraer was more sheltered, but had no real harbour. The eighteenth- and nineteenth-century customs accounts reveal that Stranraer had gradually drawn ahead of Portpatrick in terms of its success as a port. In 1755, Stranraer's customs dues amounted to £74 5s 3d, compared with Portpatrick's £61 9s 1d. Twenty years later, the balance was more in Stranraer's favour with £109 1s 8d against £45 5s 8d. A further sample year, 1795, indicates Stranraer with customs of £131 7s 8d and Portpatrick standing at £51 3s.¹³³ Violent storms in 1869 ended the contest, for Portpatrick's harbour and lighthouse were so damaged that they were left unrepaired. In 1872 the paddle steamer *Princess Louise* introduced the regular Stranraer–Larne service.

Building works on the harbour continued to put the finances of the town under excessive strain and, as a result, the nineteenth century was a prolonged period of debt. Sale of public property and lands brought in a small revenue. In 1823, the old school

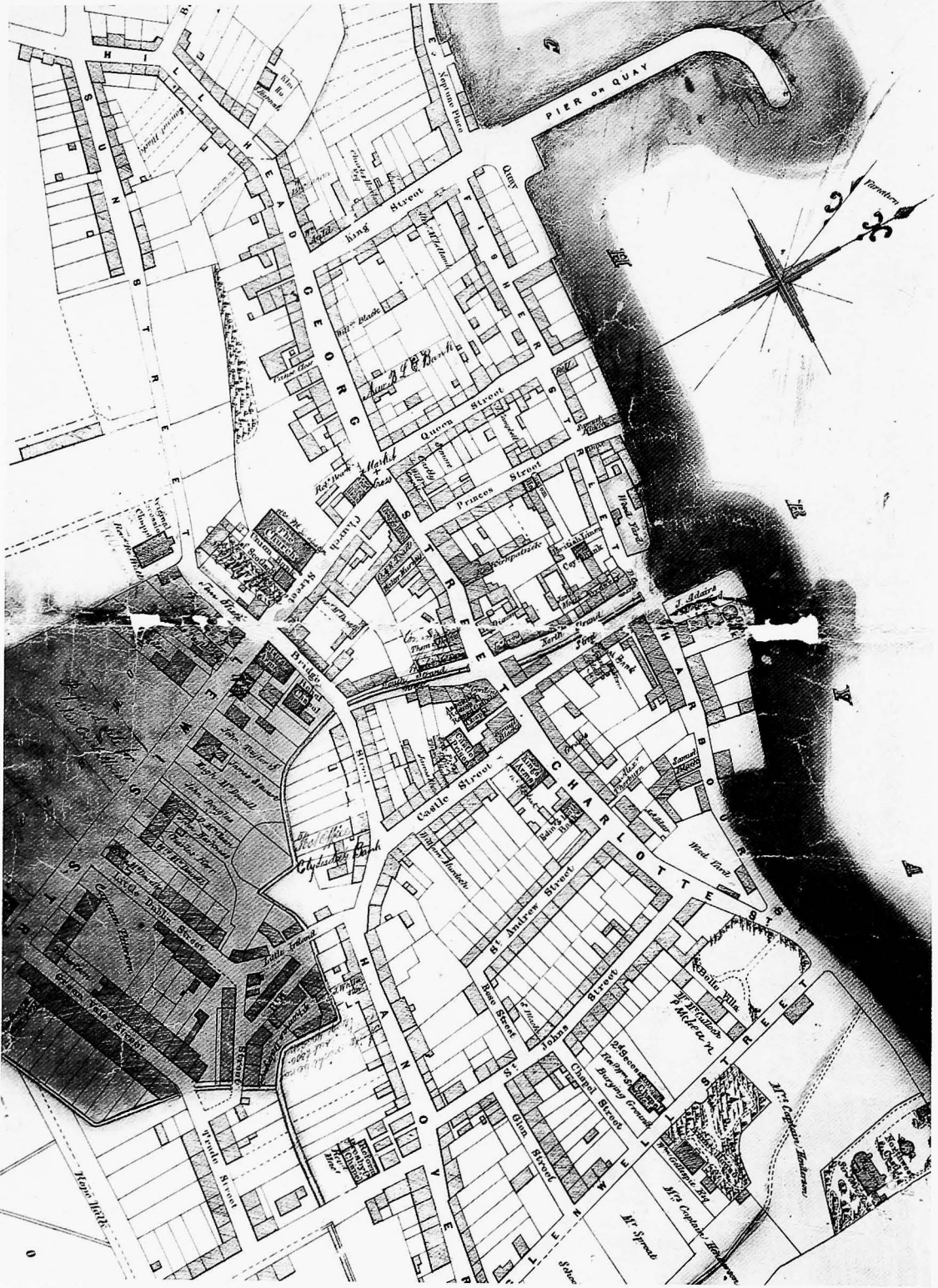


figure 6
John Wood's plan of
Stranraer, 1843
National Library

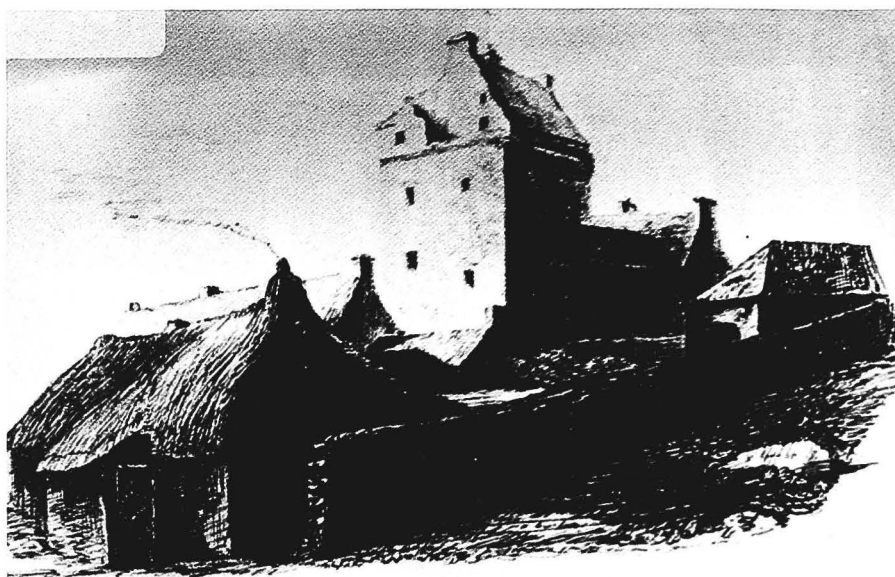


figure 7
Stranraer Castle
c 1810

house was sold for £190; six years later the common muir was set to public roup and raised £515.¹³⁴ Some industry assisted the town's economy, such as brick-making, which supplied a local market. Stranraer was one of the few Galloway centres able to concentrate milling in larger units after the demise of many small mills, as arable farming gave way to dairying after the 1850s.¹³⁵ Other small manufacturing pursuits were attempted in the town, some with long-term success. A printing works was established in 1843 when the *Free Press* was set up in Castle Street; bacon curing was started in 1852 rather than pork being exported to Ireland for processing; and the first mention of a milk factory or creamery comes in 1882.¹³⁶ However, a commentator in 1886 noted of Stranraer that 'manufactures, on any considerable scale, are prevented by the want of water power, and the high price of fuel'—the old complaint.¹³⁷

In spite of these problems, considerable efforts were made to maintain the fabric of the traditional burgh centre and in particular to retain access for all to the Town Burn (*see p 46*).¹³⁸ Projected improvements by private individuals were carefully monitored. A request, for example, to take down 'old ruinous houses in Fisher Street' and rebuild was met with a favourable response by the Dean of Guild Court, as long as the rebuilding 'conformed to the plan produced'; the applicant was to 'lay the foundations of his front wall at least eight inches farther back from the street than the present site', as a service to both applicant and public.¹³⁹ It is clear also that it was not merely utility that prompted the decisions of the authorities. In 1826 it was decided that two adjacent gables in the main street should not be conterminous, since this would leave a small and unsightly gap on the frontage into which children or small animals might squeeze; it was laid down that 'the space between the gables of the parties [was to be] built up in front to prevent any nuisance or eyesore in the street' **figures 6, 8 & 11**.¹⁴⁰

The authorities also invested in their public buildings. The Castle of St John underwent extensive refurbishment and was converted to a new gaol for the town **figure 7** (*see p 47*).¹⁴¹ The parish church was replaced in 1841, and the old tolbooth passed out of use on the building of the new red sandstone town hall in 1872–3 (*see pp 47–8*). Some private individuals were also investing in bricks and mortar. Bellevilla House, North West Castle and Ann House, as has been noted (*see pp 21, 54–5*), added an air of respectability to the Far Fay, as did Dunbae House in Church Street **figure 21**, later converted to a bank, and other banking properties (*see pp 55–6*).

But there were also still areas of poverty. The area south of Hanover Street and Bridge Street was technically outwith the precincts of the traditional burgh, but John Wood's map of 1843 shows development in this area **figure 6**. There was a cluster of houses in Little Dublin Street (the present Millhill Street), Little Ireland and Mill Street (now Hanover Square). Conditions were squalid and this housing was the poorest in Stranraer. Within a decade or two, some of the inhabitants moved to Sloss's Close and Pretty Mill Close (later

Stranraer, George Street looking West.



figure 8
George Street in the
nineteenth century

Stranraer from West Pier

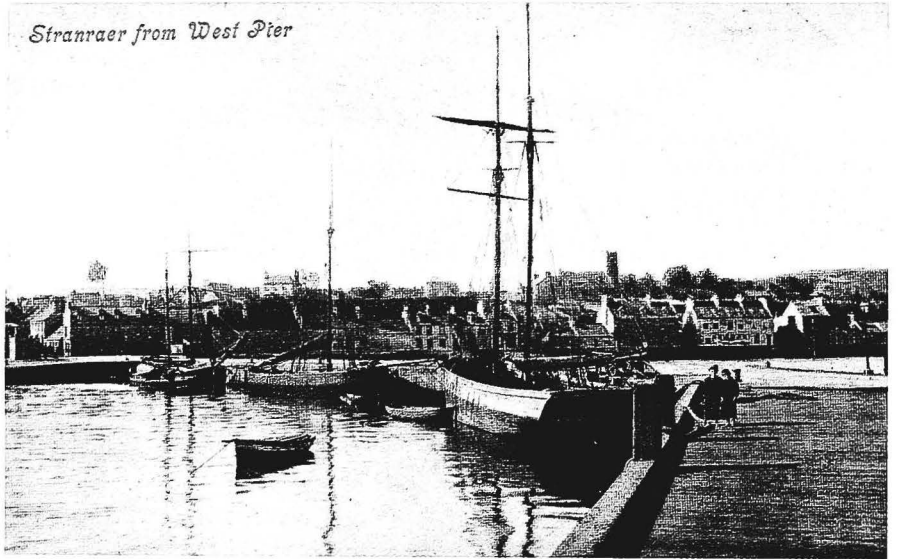


figure 9
The West Pier
c 1882

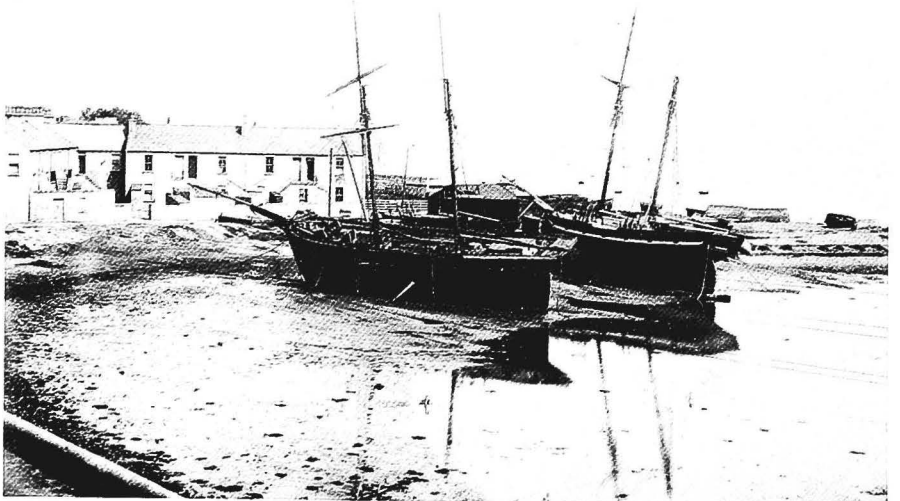


figure 10
Clayhole in 1882

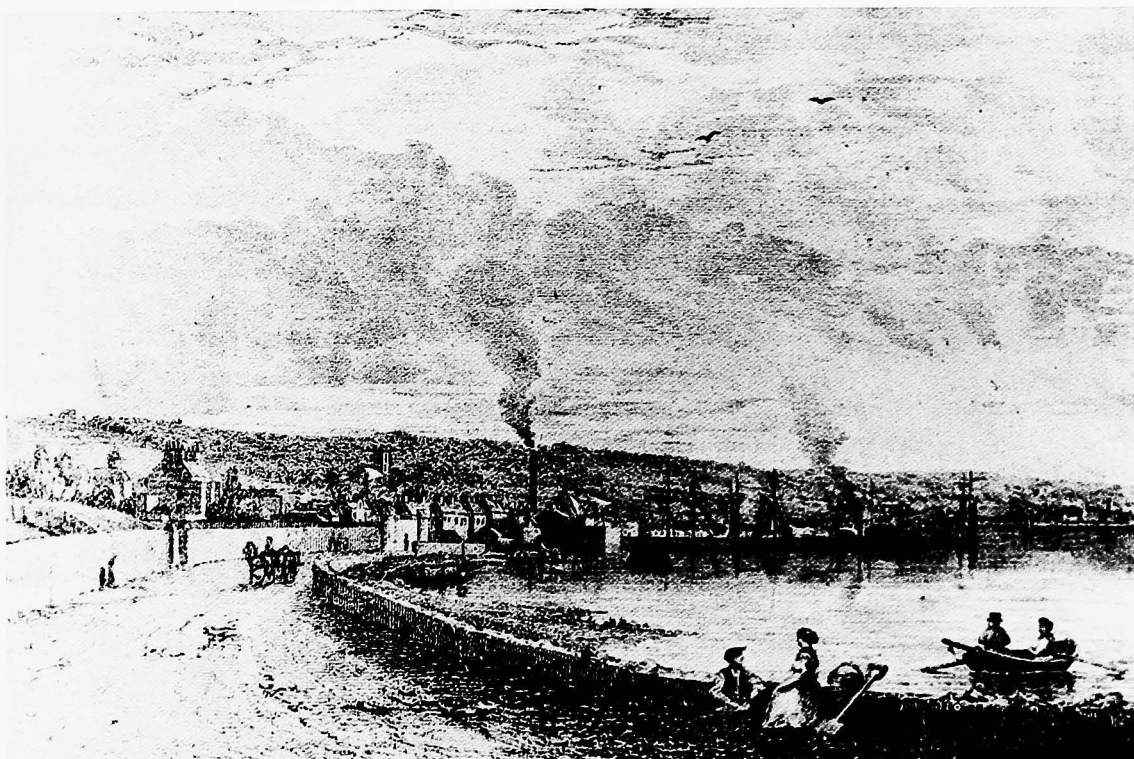


figure 11
Stranraer c 1850

called Rankin's Close), off Dalrymple Street and near to a mill which may have been the site of the old mill of Chapel. This, too, rapidly became a slum area with sub-standard housing that was not demolished until the 1930s. Recent redevelopment and upgrading obscure the earlier deprivation in this area.¹⁴²

As some of these street names suggest, this region was populated largely by Irish immigrants. The Irish had always been a distinct element of Stranraer society, but events in Ireland and in Scotland in the nineteenth century encouraged a real exodus from Ireland to Scotland. The potato famine is a well-known factor that forced many Irish families to emigrate from their homeland to Scotland, but immigration into Stranraer had been a regular feature since the burgh was founded. Work on the land or in the new Scottish construction industries, such as reservoir building or pipe-laying to the growing towns, but in particular the building of the railways, was a further incentive to emigration from Ireland. As well as laying the lines, Irish navvies were also employed at the coastal termini of the railway in related construction work, such as the erection of piers and harbour works.¹⁴³ Stranraer was only one of several west coast towns to benefit from Irish labour.

Racial, and to some extent, religious hostility¹⁴⁴ doubtless accounted for many of the derogatory tales of Irish uncouthness and pauperism. One-fifth of Stranraer's paupers, estimated as totalling 4,002 by 1861, were made up of Irish immigrants.¹⁴⁵ This proportion would rise with seasonal migration. The extent of poverty may be measured by the efforts of the debt-ridden Town Council to tackle it, although the picture may be obscured by the ability of local authorities, at least before the Poor Law Amendment (Scotland) Act of 1845, to ignore poverty if they did not intend to deal with it. By 1843, the condition of the poor was one of desperation and an assessment of 10d in the £ was placed, despite many objections, on the 500 wealthiest ratepayers in the burgh. This did not solve the problem and, four years later, a 'lawless mob' forced shopkeepers to sell oatmeal at prices below the market value. Further measures included the setting up of soup kitchens; a clothing society established in 1856 to lend blankets to the poor and nine years later to sell clothes to the poor and aged at half price; and from 1878 until the end of the century, a daily dole out of coal, money and 120 food rations.¹⁴⁶ The *35th Annual Report of the Board of Supervision for the Relief of the Poor and of Public Health in Scotland (1879–80)* summed up the destitution. Taking 1 in 39 as the line of mean pauperism in Scotland, Forfar county and Clackmannan region were found to be the least affected, with 1 in 59.4

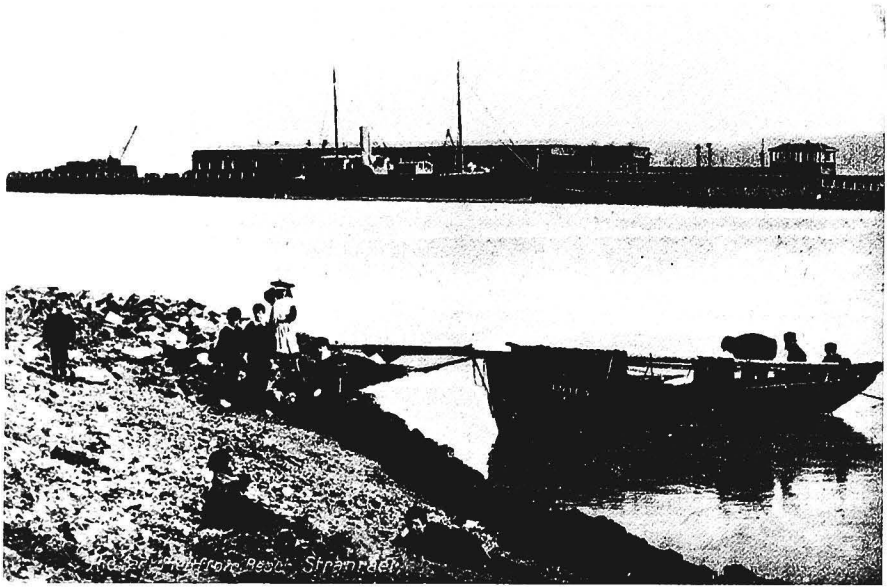


figure 12
Portrodie and the
East Pier c 1900

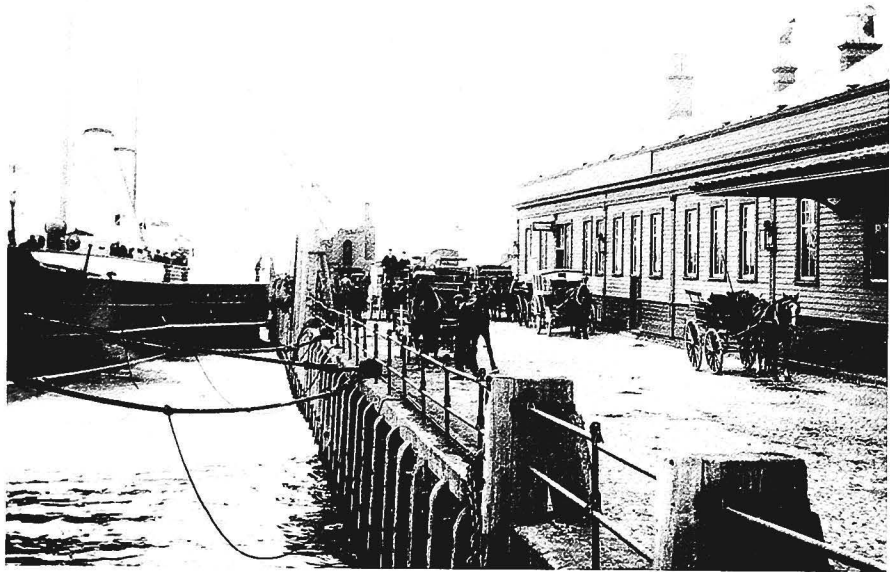


figure 13
The East Pier in the
early twentieth
century

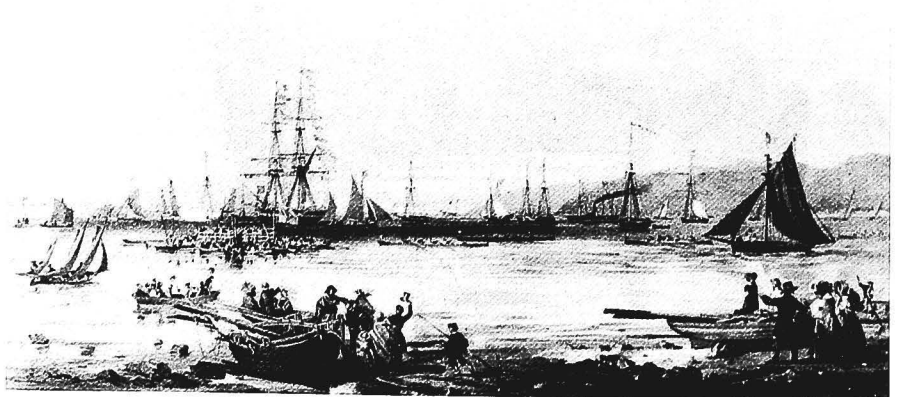


figure 14
Loch Ryan Regatta
c 1846

and 1 in 58.1 respectively. By comparison, the worst areas were the regions of Ayr, Kirkcudbright and Wigtown (which included Stranraer). Ayr's level of pauperism was 1 in 32.7 and Kirkcudbright's 1 in 31.5, while Wigtown, including Stranraer, the poorest area in Scotland, had pauperism at 1 in 27.8.¹⁴⁷

One of the reasons for Stranraer's problems was the debt accumulated as a result of the construction of harbour works. In 1874, the wooden section of the new pier was deemed to be unsafe for trains and two years later the Council refused access even to horse-drawn carriages, so flimsy was the structure. In the event, it was the stonework of the pier that partially collapsed. Dredging work was still essential to give the harbour basin a greater draught, but this, too, was costly. By 1877 the Railway Company successfully petitioned parliament to take over the running of the east pier; the Council, in spite of mounting debts, had wished to retain control. The town received a minimum of £500 compensation annually, but still had to take out a further loan of £8,000 the following year. By 1892 the Council was forced to renounce all its rights to the east pier (*see* pp 37–80). Extensive modernisation of the pier and harbour works were essential if the Railway Company was to receive an adequate turnover. An alternative pier proposed for Cairnryan was a pistol at Stranraer's head—this would inevitably bring the abandonment of Stranraer. The town had no option **figures 12 & 13**.

In spite of all the town's efforts to prevent the take-over, it was perhaps Stranraer's salvation. The Railway Company had argued that it would be 'forced to spend much money on dredging and alterations, and to provide a new covered station, platform and overhead platform-connecting bridge'. The Council could not afford to subsidise any of this if it was to reduce its vast debts.¹⁴⁸ The following years were ones of extensive financial investment by the Railway Company, followed by huge developments and modernisation to adapt to the war- and peace-time needs of the twentieth century.

Stranraer, at the head of the sheltered Loch Ryan, has been host to many: prehistoric man, perhaps Romans, Northumbrians and Vikings, Galwegians and Irish, annual regattas of sailing boats in the nineteenth century **figure 14** and American and British troops during the last war. But its principal function, throughout its history, has been that of a haven to travellers crossing between Ireland and Scotland, a role it fulfils to this day as the premier port for the Irish Sea crossing.

notes

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| <p>1 T Darvill, <i>Prehistoric Britain</i> (London, 1987), 63–4.</p> <p>2 <i>Ibid</i>, 66.</p> <p>3 <i>Ibid</i>, 75.</p> <p>4 D V Clarke <i>et al</i>, <i>Symbols of Power at the Time of Stonehenge</i> (Edinburgh, 1985), 296.</p> <p>5 Darvill, <i>Prehistoric Britain</i>, 103.</p> <p>6 <i>Ibid</i>, 133.</p> <p>7 A L F Rivet & C Smith, <i>The Place-Names of Roman Britain</i> (London, 1979), 425.</p> <p>8 <i>Ibid</i>, 447.</p> <p>9 S Frere, <i>Britannia</i> (3rd edn, London, 1978), 127–8.</p> <p>10 Though not yet published, the results of these surveys have been transcribed for the National Monuments Record database, housed in RCAHMS.</p> | <p>11 P H Hill, 'Whithorn: the missing years', in R D Oram and G P Stell (edd), <i>Galloway: Land and Lordship</i> (Edinburgh, 1991), 27–44.</p> <p>12 D J Craig, 'Pre-Norman sculpture in Galloway: some territorial implications', in R D Oram and G P Stell (edd), <i>Galloway: Land and Lordship</i> (Edinburgh, 1991), 45–62.</p> <p>13 G P Stell <i>Exploring Scotland's Heritage: Dumfries and Galloway</i> (Edinburgh, 1986), no 76, 154–5.</p> <p>14 C E Lowe 'New light on the Anglian 'Minster' at Hoddom', <i>TDCNHAS</i>, 3rd ser, lxvi (1991), 11–35.</p> <p>15 <i>See</i> E J Cowan 'The Vikings in Galloway' in R D Oram and</p> |
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- G P Stell (edd), *Galloway: Land and Lordship* (Edinburgh, 1991), 63–75, for a particularly sceptical view.
- 16 Hill, 'Whithorn', 34–40, figs 3.7–3.8.
- 17 See Cowan 'The Vikings', *passim*, and D Brooke 'Gall-Gaidhil and Galloway' in same volume, 97–116, *passim*.
- 18 See A Turner Simpson and S Stevenson 'Historic Wigtown: the archaeological implications of development', *Scottish Burgh Survey*, 1981.
- 19 Andrew Symson, 'A Large History of Galloway', 1684. Printed in W Mackenzie, *The History of Galloway*, 2 vols. (Kirkcudbright, 1841), ii, 82.
- 20 Personal comments from Mr Donnie Nelson.
- 21 *RMS*, i, no 551, appendix ii, Robert I, index A, no 610.
- 22 *ER*, xiv, Appendix, *Libri Responsum*, 537; Anon, *The Castle of St John* (Wigtown District Museum Service, n d), 4.
- 23 *Ibid*, 2; *RMS*, iii, nos. 325, 869.
- 24 NLS, Adv MS M.6.15, no 14.
- 25 *RMS*, i, no 366.
- 26 SRO, MS Stair Muniments, GD/135/1–2.
- 27 *RCRB*, i, 483.
- 28 *RCRB*, ii, 54.
- 29 Stranraer Museum, MS Stranraer Burgh Court Book, 1596–1672, ST/1/1/0.
- 30 Stranraer Museum, MS Protocol Book of James Glover, 1588–1618, ST/1/7/0; MS Protocol Book of William Gairdner, 1596–1617, ST/1/7/5.
- 31 MS ST/1/1/0, 26 October 1596.
- 32 MS ST/1/1/0.
- 33 MS ST/1/7/0, fo 97v.
- 34 MS ST/1/1/0.
- 35 *RCRB*, ii, 280–81.
- 36 MS ST/1/7/0, fo 85v.
- 37 *Ibid*, fos. 89v, 95, 95v, 105, for example.
- 38 MS ST/1/7/0, fo 44v, for example.
- 39 *Ibid*, fo 25.
- 40 *Ibid*, fo 91.
- 41 *Ibid*, fo 98.
- 42 MS ST/1/7/5, fo 15.
- 43 *Ibid*, fo 16.
- 44 MS ST/1/1/0, 17 January 1609.
- 45 *RMS*, vii, no 1665.
- 46 *Ibid*.
- 47 Morrison, 'Galloway', 3.
- 48 MS ST/1/1/0, 9 May 1689.
- 49 *APS*, vi, II, 889.
- 50 *RPC*, i, 549.
- 51 T C Smout, 'The foreign trade of Dumfries and Kirkcudbright, 1672–1696', *TDGNHAS*, 3rd ser, xxxvii (1958–9), 37.
- 52 *RPC*, iv, 19.
- 53 *Ibid*, xi, 181.
- 54 *RCRB*, iii, 70; *RPC*, v, 594; *RCRB*, iv, 39.
- 55 G S Pryde, *The Burghs of Scotland* (London, 1965), 32.
- 56 *APS*, viii, 453; M Young (ed), *The Parliaments of Scotland: Burgh and Shire Commissioners*, 2 vols (Edinburgh, 1992), ii, 560.
- 57 *APS*, ix, 108.
- 58 *Acts and Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Kirk of Scotland*, ed T Thomson, 3 vols (Bannatyne Club, 1845), iii, 950.
- 59 *APS*, vi, part i, 489.
- 60 *The Castle of St John*, 7.
- 61 Stranraer Museum, MS Stranraer Council Minutes, 1684–1710, ST/1/1/1, 30 January 1689.
- 62 Symson, 'A Large History of Galloway', ii, 82.
- 63 MS ST/1/1/1, 7 March 1692.
- 64 *OSA*, v, 522, 531.
- 65 SRO, MS E/10/2.
- 66 SRO, MS E/69/25, Hearth Tax Records.
- 67 Macfarlane, *Geographical Collections*, ii, 92.
- 68 P Hume Brown (ed), *Early Travellers in Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1891), 180.
- 69 *RCRB*, iv, 666–7.
- 70 *APS*, vii, 557.
- 71 P H McKerlie, *History of the Lands and their Owners in Galloway* (Edinburgh, 1870), i, 37.
- 72 *RPC*, viii, 329.
- 73 *RCRB*, iv, 375.
- 74 *RCRB*, v, 174.
- 75 *RCRB*, v, 191.
- 76 *RCRB*, v, 492.
- 77 Macfarlane, *Geographical Collections*, ii, 92.

- 78 Anon, *Stranraer: Interesting Historical Facts: Information from the Commission on Municipal Corporations, 1835* (Stranraer, 1935), 18.
- 79 MS Stranraer Burgh Court and Town Council Minute Book, 25 May 1780 to 4 December 1788 (with some earlier entries), ST/1/1/4, 20, 141–2.
- 80 MS Stranraer Burgh Court and Town Council Minute Book, 27 March 1766 to 25 May 1780, ST/1/1/3, 110.
- 81 MS ST/1/1/4, 154.
- 82 MS ST/1/1/4, 20 June 1787.
- 83 MS ST/1/1/4, 3 May 1788.
- 84 MS ST/1/1/4, 9 January 1788, 14 January 1788.
- 85 RCRB, vii, 550, 578.
- 86 MS ST/1/1/3, 46; MS ST/1/1/4, 53–5.
- 87 MS ST/1/1/3, 59–61.
- 88 MS ST/1/1/4, 2 June 1779.
- 89 MS ST/1/1/4, 21 May 1787.
- 90 MS ST/1/1/4, 69–70.
- 91 MS ST/1/1/4, 216.
- 92 MS ST/1/1/3, 16–17.
- 93 MS ST/1/1/3, 26, 35–6.
- 94 Richard Pococke, *Tours in Scotland, 1747, 1750, 1760*, ed D W Kemp (SHS, 1887); *OSA*, v, 522.
- 95 R Heron, *Scotland Delineated* (Edinburgh, 1799), 252.
- 96 *Stranraer: Interesting Historical Facts*, 22.
- 97 I Macleod, *Discovering Galloway* (Edinburgh, 1986), 249.
- 98 *OSA*, v, 528.
- 99 Personal comment from Mr Donnie Nelson.
- 100 J S Boyd, *The Royal and Ancient Burgh of Stranraer, 1617–1967* (n d).
- 101 MS in Stranraer Public Library. These figures are based on those cited in the census. A summary, however, mentions 269 children in the burgh, of whom less than half are detailed in the census. The figures used in the summary are those used by *OSA*.
- 102 *Stranraer: Interesting Historical Facts*, 22; Boyd, *Stranraer*.
- 103 SRO, MS Stair Muniments, GD135/251.
- 104 I Donnachie, *The Industrial Archaeology of Galloway* (Newton Abbot, 1971), 56.
- 105 *OSA*, v, 524.
- 106 M.C. Arnott, *Stranraer in Earlier Times* (Edinburgh, 1959), 5–6.
- 107 Heron, *Scotland Delineated*, 252.
- 108 J Webster, *General View of the Agriculture of Galloway* (Edinburgh, 1794), 16, quoted in L E Cochran, *Scottish Trade with Ireland in the Eighteenth Century* (Edinburgh, 1985), 151.
- 109 Cochran, *Scottish Trade with Ireland*, 151.
- 110 W McIlwraith, *The Visitor's Guide to Wigtownshire* (Dumfries, 1877), 93.
- 111 Heron, *Scotland Delineated*, ii, 131.
- 112 *OSA*, v, 525.
- 113 MS, ST/1/1/3, 6, 23, 31, 61 and *passim*.
- 114 Heron, *Scotland Delineated*, 252.
- 115 Heron, as quoted in Donnachie, *Industrial Archaeology of Galloway*, 85.
- 116 Cochran, *Scottish Trade with Ireland*, 151.
- 117 Donnachie, *Industrial Archaeology of Galloway*, 20.
- 118 Heron, *Scotland Delineated*, 252.
- 119 Donnachie, *Industrial Archaeology of Galloway*, 22.
- 120 Boyd, *Stranraer*.
- 121 J M Corrie, *The 'Droving Days' in the South-Western District of Scotland* (Dumfries, 1915), 131.
- 122 I L Donnachie & I Macleod, *Old Galloway* (Plymouth, 1974), 124.
- 123 *OSA*, v, 523.
- 124 *Ibid.*
- 125 F H Groome, *Ordnance Gazetteer of Scotland*, 6 vols (Edinburgh, 1886), vi, 408.
- 126 I F Macleod (ed), *Shipping in Dumfries and Galloway in 1820* (Scottish Local History Texts, no 1, Glasgow, 1973), 10.
- 127 SRO, GD135/2572/2.
- 128 Boyd, *Stranraer*.
- 129 Donnachie, *Industrial Archaeology of Galloway*, 26, 154, 159.
- 130 Boyd, *Stranraer*.
- 131 *Ibid.*
- 132 Donnachie, *Industrial Archaeology of Galloway*, 27, gives further details.
- 133 SRO, MS E504/34/2; E504/34/5; E504/34/9.

- 134 *Stranraer: Interesting Historical Facts*, 5.
- 135 Donnachie, *Industrial Archaeology of Galloway*, 25, 31.
- 136 Boyd, *Stranraer*.
- 137 Groome, *Ordnance Gazetteer*, vi, 408.
- 138 MS Dean of Guild Court Book, 14 June 1803 to 24 June 1848, ST/1/3/1, 20 March 1805.
- 139 *Ibid*, 20 January 1826.
- 140 *Ibid*, June 1826 *passim*.
- 141 G Stell, 'Castles and towers in south-western Scotland: some recent surveys', *TDGNHAS*, 3rd ser, lvii (1982), 76.
- 142 Personal comment from Mr Donnie Nelson.
- 143 J E Handley, *The Irish in Modern Scotland* (Cork, 1947), 124.
- 144 *Ibid*, 264; J E Handley, *The Navy in Scotland* (Cork, 1970), 269.
- 145 Boyd, *Stranraer*.
- 146 *Ibid*.
- 147 *35th Annual Report of the Board of Supervision for the Relief of the Poor and of Public Health in Scotland, 1879-80* (Edinburgh, 1880), 10.
- 148 Boyd, *Stranraer*.

area by area assessment

pp 35-53

historic buildings

pp 55-60

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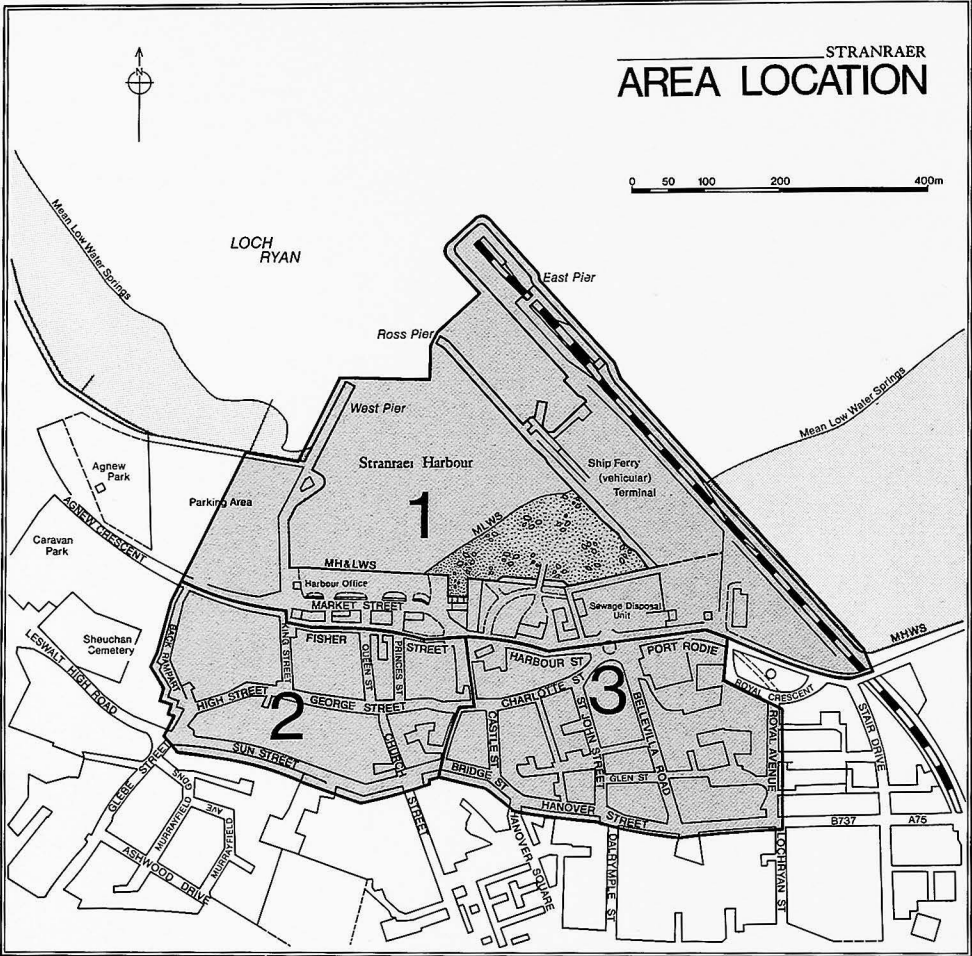


figure 15
Area location map

For this survey, the medieval core of the burgh has been divided into three discrete areas **figure 15**: one at the northern end of the town incorporating the harbour and areas of later land reclamation (Area 1); one to the east of North/South Strand Streets (Area 2); and one to the west of North/South Strand Streets (Area 3).

These divisions have been made arbitrarily for the sake of convenience. Stranraer in fact developed from two separate settlements, one on either side of the Town Burn, the line of which is now marked by North and South Strand Streets; and this historical twofold division should also be borne in mind.

Loch Ryan represents an easily identifiable northern limit to the development of the burgh. Traditionally, Bellevilla Road and Back Rampart defined the eastern and western boundaries to the burgh respectively, with the southern limit probably represented by Sun Street, Bridge Street and Hanover Street.

Both Strand Streets form the central division between Areas 2 and 3 to the east and west respectively, and each area overlaps to a certain extent to take in the frontage on the opposite side of the street. Consequently, important features of the medieval townscape are not lost in the divisions between areas. For reference, areas within areas, ie groups of properties which are bounded on all sides by major streets, have been defined in the text as 'blocks'.

area 1

Agnew Crescent/Fisher Street/Harbour Street/Harbour **figure 16**

description

This area comprises the north side of Fisher Street, Market Street, Harbour Street, the Harbour, and East and West Piers. Market Street is absent from Wood's 1843 map of the burgh **figure 6** which suggests that Fisher Street, which is marked, must have formed the medieval waterfront, despite the fact that it was no more than a back lane. The area to the north of Fisher Street and Harbour Street was all built on land reclaimed in the nineteenth century or later.

The 'Marine Lake' **G**, to the west of the West Pier, has recently been backfilled in advance of a proposed new terminal for the 'Sea Cat' ferry service, and is being used as a temporary car park. There is a narrow strip of buildings between Fisher Street and Market Street at the western end of this area. The north frontage of Fisher Street, like the south frontage, has fallen into disrepair and many of the buildings are vacant. At the eastern end, the line of Fisher Street is almost lost. Here, an area of industrial works and warehousing has recently been demolished and the land turned over to car parking.

North of the Market Street frontage is the Sea Cat terminal and associated car parking. North of Harbour Street is again used predominantly for car parking, but occasional buildings, parts of old works, stand isolated.

historical background

From the late sixteenth century until the nineteenth century the land to the north of the lane that is now called Fisher Street lay largely vacant. During this period the land mass between Loch Ryan and Stranraer was, in fact, only a small strip: at high tide, vessels as large as 60 to 100 tons were able to anchor 'close by the houses',¹ and it was claimed in

archaeological potential and future development *see* **figure 22**

Development referred to in the most recent Local Plan (1988) includes improvement to the West Pier car parking facilities.

As this area was only reclaimed in the nineteenth century, there is very little of medieval interest here. The absence of a recognised harbour in the medieval period would also

the seventeenth century that ships might even 'put ashore' at Stranraer.² The high tide could almost reach the North West Castle (*see* p 55), and the gates of its boat house are still to be seen in the exterior wall; as late as the early twentieth century, a house on the south side of Fisher Street still retained the chain and ring on its wall for tying up boats. At low tide, however, the anchorages might be a full quarter of a mile from the town.

Although there are references to a 'harbour' in the seventeenth century, for example in the report of a visitation of the Commissioners of the Convention of Royal Burghs in 1692, these apply solely to the natural sheltered anchorage afforded by the southern end of Loch Ryan.³ Lack of a pier or artificial harbour during this period hampered development in this area. As late as 1764 the port possessed only two vessels, of 30 or 35 tons each.⁴ By 1777, the town proposed to build a small harbour, being aware of the potential for growing trade and for white herring fishing. An appeal was made to the Convention of Royal Burghs for financial assistance.⁵ The following year this project had to be abandoned. The Convention was not prepared to help unless Stranraer raised two-thirds of the costs. Estimated costs were £1,549 8s, which would have left the burgh with barely £4 4s 6d annual income at a time when funds were required for repairs to the parish church and court house.⁶

It was only with the commencement of harbour works in the nineteenth century that this area began to play a major role in the life of Stranraer. In 1817, a contract was drawn up between the magistrates and the community of the burgh and Kenneth and Donald Mathieson 'for the erection or formulation of a harbour or port for vessels'.⁷ The building of a small west pier **A** was completed in 1820 at a cost of £3,800 **figure 9**, this being covered by loans of £2,000 from the Exchequer and £500 from the Convention of Royal Burghs. A further £2,000 or so was raised from private individuals and the Paisley Banking Company.⁸ To recoup some of these expenses, dues were levied over the next three years on shipmasters using the new facilities. An appeal against the magistrates' claim to the right to raise such dues resulted in a decision in favour of the shipmasters—which left Stranraer in debt for years.⁹ In 1830, the Council found a partial solution by placing a chain across the harbour entrance and refusing access to those who would not pay dues. Work continued on the quay over the next few decades, in particular deepening and lengthening the harbour, although many boats were beached at Clayhole in order to avoid the harbour dues at the quay **figure 10**. Continuing financial hardship did not prevent the Council considering, in 1855, an extension costing £11,000 or a new harbour at £28,000.

Stranraer was frequented by commercial cargo vessels, yachts and paddle steamers **figure 14**. With the arrival of the first steam train in Stranraer in 1861, a vast transformation began. In this year the Railway Company advanced a loan of £20,000 for the erection of a second pier **B**, in order to connect the Scottish railway with the newly-opened Carrickfergus and Larne railway. The agreement gave berthage priority to the

history

archaeology

imply that there is unlikely to have been an early waterfront. However, industry was increasingly attracted to the new harbour and by the mid or late nineteenth century (*see* p 38), there were woodyards **C** & **D**, a gas works **E** and a slaughterhouse **F**.

Although much later in date than the historic core of the burgh, this area should be seen as an important industrial landscape and an integral part of Stranraer's history. The few remaining sites from this period would be of considerable interest to industrial archaeologists, both as standing buildings and below ground remains. This industrial archaeology interest should be taken into account if environmental improvements are envisaged in this area in the future.

previous archaeological work

No chance finds have been reported from this area and no previous archaeological work has taken place here.

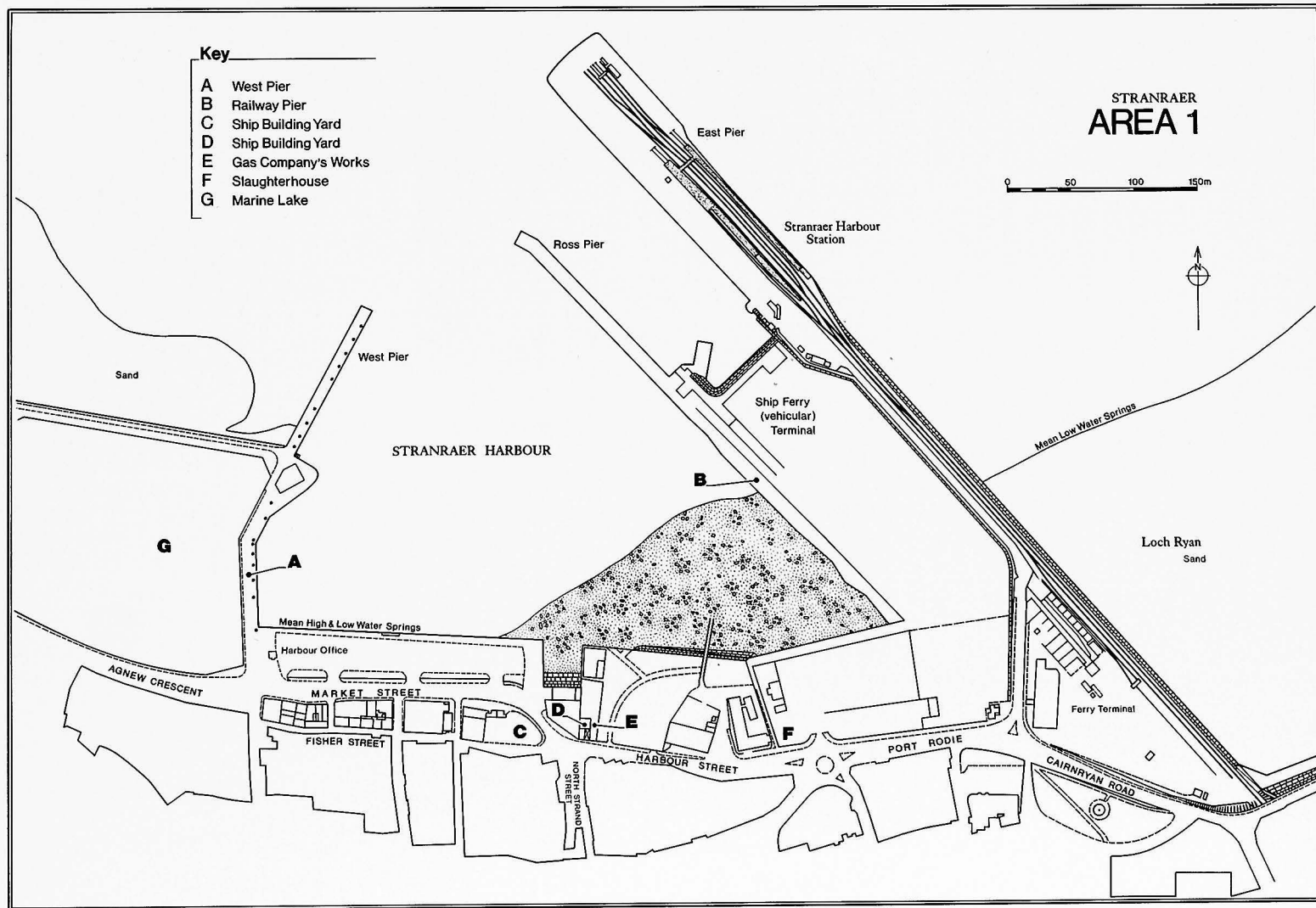


figure 16
Area 1

Railway Company at the pier that the Council would build, own and maintain in return for a rental of £1,000 annually. The new pier was so insubstantial however, that, even at a cost of a further borrowing of £2,600 by the Council, there was a danger of the rival Portpatrick–Donaghadee route being reopened until a violent storm in 1869 finally destroyed Portpatrick's harbour and lighthouse. In 1872 the paddle steamer *Princess Louise* introduced the regular Stranraer–Larne service.

But repair and maintenance work on the new pier proved costly, and the stonework partially collapsed, although it had been the wooden part of the pier, which adjoined the shore, that had been deemed unsafe for trains in 1874. Dredging continued, but at even greater cost. In 1877, after petitioning parliament, the Railway Company took over the control of the east pier in exchange for a minimum £500 yearly compensation. By 1892 the Council was forced to renounce all rights to the east pier, as extensive modernisation was essential for the Railway Company's profits, in exchange for assistance to the Council to repay an £8,000 loan taken out in 1878. The alternative for the Council was the abandonment by the railways of the Stranraer pier in favour of a potential new pier at Cairnryan. There was little option for the town **figures 12 & 13**. From that time, however, extensive financial investment in pier works, harbour works and dredging ensured that Stranraer retained its position as the premier port for the Irish Sea crossing.¹⁰

The foreshore alongside the harbour works reflected the increasing maritime activity. By 1843 two large woodyards, supporting the growing shipbuilding industry, were sited on the foreshore **C & D**, as was the Gas Company's works from 1839 **E**. Reclaimed land along the forefront also encouraged further industry, a slaughterhouse to the west of Portrodie in 1870 **F**, for example, but in particular along the Breastwork, planned in 1864 and completed in 1902, where Market Street now stands. With the closure of the tolbooth and the old townhouse by 1873, markets were transferred to the Breastwork, and a new weighing machine was sited here. Horse fairs continued on this site until the 1930s.

notes

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| 1 | <i>OSA</i> , v, 522. | 5 | <i>RCRB</i> , vii, 550. |
| 2 | Macfarlane, <i>Geographical Collections</i> , ii, 116. | 6 | <i>Ibid</i> , 578. |
| 3 | <i>RCRB</i> , iv, 666. | 7 | SRO, GD135/2572/2. |
| 4 | Groome, <i>Ordnance Gazetteer of Scotland</i> , vi, 408. | 8 | Boyd, <i>Stranraer</i> . |
| | | 9 | <i>Stranraer: Interesting Historical Facts</i> , 7. |

area 2

North Strand Street and South Strand Street/Bridge Street/Hanover Street/Bellevilla Road/Harbour Street figure 17

description

This area extends from Harbour Street at the north end of the town to Bridge Street/Hanover Street in the south, and from North/South Strand Streets in the west to Bellevilla Road in the east. It also incorporates Charlotte Street, Castle Street, St Andrew Street, St John's Street, Rose Street, Glen Street and Thistle Street. For ease of use, this area has been further sub-divided into four smaller areas or 'blocks'.

block 1

Much of the block bounded by Charlotte Street, North Strand Street and Harbour Street, at the north end of this area, has been set aside as car parking, particularly along the Harbour Street frontage **K**. This serves the public as well as a number of offices and a supermarket. The supermarket **L**, at the eastern end of this block and on the site of a nineteenth-century woodyard, is a recent development, extending back from the Charlotte Street frontage to Harbour Street.

block 2

The Castle of St John stands within the block defined by George Street/Charlotte Street, South Strand Street, Bridge Street and Castle Street. Although the castle now stands in some isolation, within a grassed area, before the 1960s it was almost entirely surrounded by later buildings. These were gradually demolished and the castle itself was restored in 1988–9. To the south and in the shadow of the castle, some of these nineteenth-century buildings still survive **M**, but in a state of disrepair. Behind these, to the south again, is an area used as office car parking. A new building society office has recently been built on the South Strand Street frontage **N**. South Strand Street itself has been partly pedestrianised.

block 3

The block defined by Charlotte Street, Castle Street, Hanover Street and St John's Street is one of the most developed areas within the burgh. There is a large car park **O** between St Andrew Street and St John's Street. New offices and shops have been developed, between the 1960s and the 1980s, along the St Andrew Street west frontage **P**, Rose Street south frontage and Charlotte Street **Q**, together with a small supermarket at the corner of Castle Street and Hanover Street. Open yards exist behind the St Andrew Street west frontage. The Post Office depot at the corner of St John's Street and Hanover Street is modern.

block 4

The last block in this area is bounded by Hanover Street, St John's Street, Bellevilla Road and Harbour Street/Portrodie. The north end contains some open areas, including gardens and a small cemetery **R**, immediately to the north of Thistle Street. Some open yard areas associated with businesses on Thistle Street and Glen Street lie immediately to the south of the respective frontages.

To the east of Bellevilla Road, and just outside the study area, a large development **S** comprising supermarket, car parking and petrol station extends back from the London Road frontage. Between this development and Portrodie lie Ann House **G** and North West Castle **I**, both with extensive gardens.

historical background

This area encloses the late medieval settlement of Chapel, or ‘clachan of St John’.¹ This stood on the eastern banks of a burn that followed the approximate line of the present South Strand Street and North Strand Street, entering Loch Ryan at the north-east end of Fisher Street A. By 1762, and presumably for some time previously since it is referred to as ‘old’, a waulkmill stood on the east bank of the burn, somewhere between the castle of Stranraer (*see* p 53) and the loch—that is, either on the site of the present Castle Green or in North Strand Street.² The Burgh Court Book of Stranraer refers to the waulkmill of Chapel in 1693 and it may be presumed to be one and the same, as this earlier mention is associated with repair work of bridges over the Waulkmill Water, indicating that it was sited in an area of settlement. Several bridges, both municipal and private, linked the east and west of the town—the small settlement of Chapel on the east of the Burn and the settlement called Stranraer on the west bank. The main street, now George Street and Charlotte Street, was once called Cross Street, as it crossed the burn. By the nineteenth century, the burn was to be a source of disquiet to the authorities. It had been a disposal spot for rubbish from the sixteenth century onwards, and increasing manufactories and sewage in the nineteenth century exacerbated the problem. An assessment of the foul state of the burn for the Police Commissioners in 1887 highlighted the pollution and potential diseases arising from stagnant sewage.³ An attempt to remove pigs from the dwellings near the burn in 1903 failed; there were still one hundred in the burgh in 1927. The problem of sanitation was not fully resolved until the 1930s, when modern sewage pipes were installed.

The settlement was named after a chapel. This chapel was ruinous by the seventeenth century,⁴ and its exact location is not known, although the east portion of a house standing

archaeological potential and future development *see* figure 22

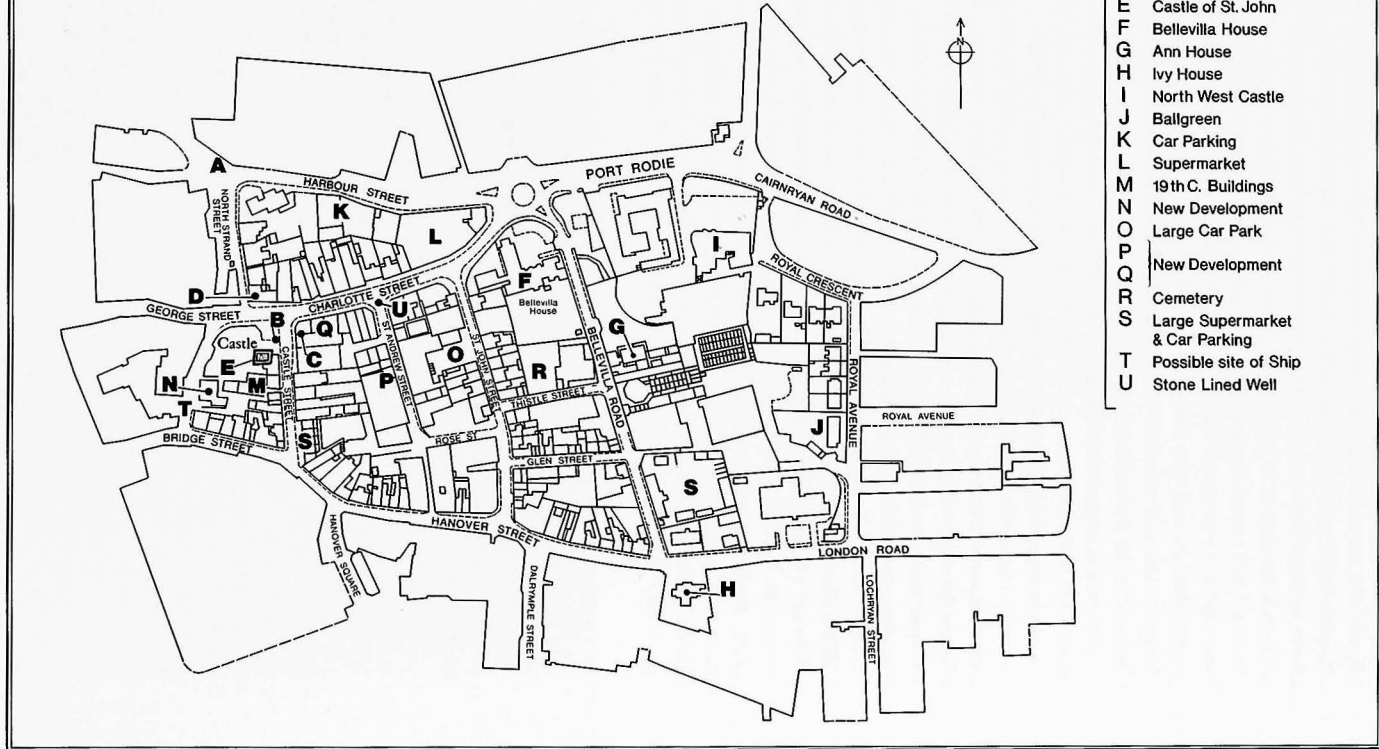
Development referred to in the most recent Local Plan (1988) includes street improvement schemes for George Street, Hanover Street and Castle Street.

The only archaeological work that has been carried out within this area has taken place within the castle itself, which is a Scheduled Ancient Monument. With much of the area to the east of St John’s Street developed after the late eighteenth century, and the area between Castle Street and St John’s Street having undergone significant development in recent years, the archaeological potential of Area 2 is concentrated around the western end. This is the heart of the late medieval settlement of Chapel, and evidence of the early settlement may well survive here, possibly clustered along the eastern bank of the Town Burn (now the east frontages of both North and South Strand Streets). Any further development, or indeed any other types of ground disturbance here, must be monitored closely.

The exact locations of a number of important features of this early settlement are as yet uncertain. They include the chapel, the waulkmill, and the ‘ship’ or boat found in 1683 straddling the Town Burn (*see* pp 43–4). Its position was described as well beyond the spring tide and a considerable distance from the shore, both of which suggest that it was found towards the Bridge Street end of South Strand Street. As it lay transversely across the Town Burn, it falls into both Areas 2 and 3 of this study. This would be an important find in its own right should it ever be discovered again.

An eye-witness account of the development at the corner of Castle Street and Charlotte Street—potentially an ideal spot for a chapel given its proximity to the castle—reported nothing present but natural sand. This observation was not undertaken by archaeologists but, if it is an accurate assessment, then it is disappointing—not only for the identification of the chapel site, but also for the overall archaeological potential of the burgh. Given that there has been development along the south frontage of Charlotte Street between Castle Street and St John’s Street, it may indeed be true that little survives here (*see* p 52).

STRANRAER
AREA 2



Key

A	Burn enters Lochryan
B	Possible site of Chapel
C	
D	
E	
F	Castle of St. John
G	Bellevilla House
H	Ann House
I	Ivy House
J	North West Castle
K	Ballgreen
L	Car Parking
M	Supermarket
N	19th C. Buildings
O	New Development
P	Large Car Park
Q	New Development
R	
S	Cemetery
T	Large Supermarket & Car Parking
U	Possible site of Ship
	Stone Lined Well

figure 17
Area 2

in 1830–40 between Charlotte Street and the castle was reputedly on the site of the chapel **B**, and the area between the Town Burn and the present St John's Street was known as the 'chapel-land' in 1840.⁵ It has been conjectured more recently that its site was that of the present-day Woolworth's store **C**, but excavation by workmen prior to the building of this modern development revealed no trace of it. An alternative site is the corner of North Strand Street and Charlotte Street **D**.⁶ The chapel, dedicated to St John, was reputedly founded in 1484 by one of the sisters of Bishop Adair of Kinhilt, a member of a local landed family, and may have replaced an earlier chapel.⁷ Certainly, by 1484 the lands of Chapel were in the control of the Adairs of Kinhilt, who had arrived in Scotland from Ireland in the thirteenth century.

When the settlement first grew up beside the chapel is unclear, but the building of an L-shaped tower house or castle **E** by the Adairs, probably around 1520, on the east bank of the burn, doubtless attracted further settlement **figure 7**. By the end of the sixteenth century, the castle was probably functioning more as a family residence than as an administrative centre or a court for the locality; in 1596, it was reserved to one Elizabeth Kennedy, suggesting that the ownership of the castle might have changed hands as a result of marriage. In the 1670s, it came into the hands of the Dalrymples of Stair, becoming the headquarters of Graham of Claverhouse in 1682 during his pursuit of Galloway Covenanters. Ultimately, in 1815, it was bought by the town to function as a gaol. In the 1820s, the second floor housed criminals while the third floor held the prison cells for debtors. The roof was raised in about 1850 to accommodate an exercise area for the prisoners. How truly effective it was as a gaol is doubtful. In the 1830s the town employed three gaolers: a keeper at £20 per annum and £3 for clothes, and two assistants at £5 per annum. The records indicate a tendency to drunkenness and public brawling by the gaolers, and the gaol was sometimes left unlocked, allowing escapes. In 1847, when a government inspector arrived, a boy was found in sole charge of the prison.⁸

history

archaeology

The area to the south of the castle **M**, where a few nineteenth-century buildings survive in a state of disrepair, may, along with the rest of the area immediately around the castle, offer better archaeological potential. Restoration work in the cellars of the castle revealed an open drain and a second drainage channel. Although these may have been confined within the building, there is the possibility that they fed into a larger drainage system which flowed into the adjacent Town Burn.

The frontages of Charlotte Street and Castle Street, together with North and South Strand Streets, must also remain an archaeological priority despite the poor results reported during the development of the Woolworth's site **C**. A cellar study was beyond the scope of this survey but, particularly along the main street frontages, approximately half the properties would be expected to have cellars.

Street improvements may also reveal features sealed beneath the road surface itself. Underneath both Bridge Street and Charlotte Street, for example, evidence may survive of some of the many bridges that were known to cross the Town Burn. A stone-lined well has also been identified below street level at the north end of St Andrew Street **U**.

There has been more development in Area 2 than in Area 3. As a result, other than the historic standing buildings, there is little physical evidence in the form of surviving property boundaries, to indicate the layout of the medieval burgage plots in this part of the town.

previous archaeological work and chance finds

Stranraer Castle NX 061 608

Two episodes of archaeological fieldwork have taken place in Stranraer Castle, an L-shaped tower house built by the Adair family in about 1520 (*see p 53*).

For at least three centuries after 1500, this building physically dominated the area. Most of the surrounding dwellings were single-storeyed, thatched structures, two of which survived until 1917 in St Andrew Street and St John's Street **figure 7**. By 1762, attached to the castle and leading towards the burn, there was a small slated building, called the 'slate house', a stable and the castle yards.⁹ Whether this slate house functioned as the customs house is unclear, but certainly a slated house in Chapel was known as the old customs house by the eighteenth century.¹⁰ Close by the castle stood a public meeting place. This also functioned as the first Catholic chapel, under the guidance of Father John Moore, prior to the building of the first Catholic church in Stranraer in 1853. The chapel can be seen hard by the castle, with three chimneys, on a nineteenth-century painting of the castle **figure 7**. From the 1860s, stone buildings began to hem the castle in, and it was gradually eclipsed, becoming a storehouse in the 1920s. The demolition of many of the surrounding buildings in the 1960s, however, has restored to the castle much of its original visual dominance.

By the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the east end of the town, the 'Fay' of Chapel, began to come under development. A monastery or almshouse was reputed to have been sited on the shore to the east of the town in the middle ages,¹¹ but in modern times Glenwell Street (now called Bellevilla Road) was taken to be the traditional limit of the town, and the neighbouring area housed prestigious homes. Four examples still stand: Bellevilla House **F** on Charlotte Street, Ann House **G** on Bellevilla Road, Ivy House (now L'Aperitif) **H** on Hanover Street (now London Road) and North West Castle **I** on Cairnryan Road (*see pp 54–5*). The area beyond, Ballgreen **J**, remained essentially rural. To the strong objection of the Glenwell inhabitants, it was to become the site of an isolation hospital in 1849 when there was an outbreak of 300 cases of cholera in Stranraer. Ballgreen East was for a number of years after 1869 the home of Stranraer Cattle Show.

history

archaeology

Cellars, drain etc

Excavation within the two cellars took place in advance of restoration of the structure. Although they were filled with modern deposits, these overlaid two finely-cobbled floors. An open drain in the west cellar suggested that it was used for accommodating livestock. The excavation also demonstrated that the west cellar had not contained a kitchen fireplace. During consolidation work, the remains of two blocked-up mural passages and a prison-pit behind the main hall fireplace have come to light. *DES* (1979), 6.

Castle

Three areas were excavated prior to the refurbishment of the castle as a heritage centre. In the main hall, a small inner chamber at the rear of the fireplace was cleared of about 0.9 m of earth and bird droppings to reveal two stone steps. The wooden floor in front of the chamber was removed and, after removing about 0.3 m of debris and a modern cement step, the original stone slabbing was revealed. In the main hall, a small section (0.71 m x 0.51 m) of flooring in the centre of the room was cleared and the area below excavated. Pieces of oyster shell and a bird bone were recovered. In the ground floor entrance area, a section (1.16 m x 1.70 m) was excavated to reveal a floor level, at a depth of 0.21 m, and a section of drainage channel. No finds were recorded. *DES* (1989), 15.

Wooden boat NX 060 607 T

A 'ship' was found in the town in 1683, a considerable distance from the shore and well above the highest of spring tides. The vessel, found lying transversely across a little burn when a mill watergate was being dug, was only partly removed—the remaining section was covered with soil to a considerable depth and kail was grown over one end. Described as 'pretty large', it was not built in local seventeenth-century fashion. Symson's informants

notes

- | | | | |
|---------|---|----|--|
| 1 | NLS, Adv MS M.6.15, no 14, appendix no 1. Galloway. Typographed by Mr Timothy Pont. Collections on the Scottish Shires, by Sir James Balfour and Sir Robert Sibbald. Also printed in Mackenzie, <i>History of Galloway</i> , ii, 138. | 4 | Macfarlane, <i>Geographical Collections</i> , ii, 92. |
| 2 | SRO, GD135/2511. | 5 | Anon, <i>History of the Parish Church and the Churches in Stranraer Today</i> (Wigtown District Museum Service, n d), 8. |
| 3 | ‘Report to the Police Commissioners of the Burgh of Stranraer, 5 August 1887.’ In the keeping of Dumfries and Galloway Regional Council, Water and Sewerage Department. | 6 | Personal comment, Mr Donnie Nelson. |
| history | | 7 | McIlwraith, <i>Wigtownshire</i> , 89. |
| | | 8 | Boyd, <i>Stranraer</i> . |
| | | 9 | SRO, GD135/2511. |
| | | 10 | <i>Ibid.</i> |
| | | 11 | <i>Stranraer: Interesting Historical Facts</i> , 7. |

archaeology

noted that ‘the boards were not joyn’d together after the usual fashion of our present ships or barks, as (*sic*) also that it had nails of copper’, suggesting that it was of some antiquity. The ‘copper nails’ indicate that the ship may even have been Roman rather than medieval; it was almost certainly *not* Viking. The burn is almost certainly the same water course as the stream which was covered over and diverted in 1845, and associated with the names Bridge Street, North and South Strand Streets and Burnfoot. A. Symson, ‘A Large History of Galloway’, 1684. Printed in Mackenzie, *History of Galloway*, 83.

Stranraer Chapel NX 060 608

Ruinous in 1684, St John’s Chapel stood near the castle and on the east side of the stream that flowed through Stranraer but which was covered over and diverted in 1845.

area 3

North Strand Street and South Strand Street/Bridge Street/Sun Street/Back Rampart/Agnew Crescent/Fisher Street **figure 18**

description

This area is defined by North and South Strand Streets, Bridge Street/Sun Street, Back Rampart, Agnew Street and Fisher Street. It also incorporates High Street/George Street, Church Street, Princes Street, Queen Street and King Street. For ease of use, this area has been further sub-divided into four smaller areas or 'blocks'.

block 1

The north-eastern corner of this area is bounded by Fisher Street, North Strand Street, George Street and Queen Street, and incorporates Princes Street. This block has seen little recent redevelopment other than the new library **L** (originally the site of the first public school) at the corner of North Strand Street and Fisher Street. The frontage along Fisher Street, between Princes Street and North Strand Street, is virtually all car parking. Immediately to the south, and extending eastward from the Princes Street frontage, are a number of gardens **O**. These represent some of the few open, possibly undeveloped areas in the core of the medieval burgh.

block 2

To the west, bounded by Queen Street, High Street, Back Rampart and Agnew Crescent, lies the second block. The eastern end, between the Queen Street and King Street frontages, is predominantly private car parking. Much of the King Street frontage, particularly the north end, is a series of gap sites. Both the north and south frontages of Fisher Street have fallen into disrepair, and there are several vacant properties. This small block has perhaps the most pressing development needs within the historic core of the town.

The western end, between Back Rampart and King Street, contains what appear to be the best-preserved burgh plots within the town **P**, extending back from the frontages of both High Street and Agnew Crescent. Some new housing has been built along Back Rampart and Agnew Crescent.

block 3

To the south lies the largest of the blocks within Area 3, bounded by Sun Street, High Street/George Street and Church Street. This block has seen some development along both sides of the High Street/George Street frontage, particularly at the eastern end. It also contains the parish church **J** and the old townhouse or tollbooth **C**, now the museum. The main street, George Street, reaches its widest point around the junction of Queen Street and Church Street. Gardens exist behind both the Sun Street and High Street/George Street frontages but, because of the topography, they are generally quite small.

block 4

The smallest and last of the blocks within this area is bounded by South Strand Street, Bridge Street, Church Street and George Street. Much of this block, behind the frontages, comprises office and business car parking **Q**. South Strand Street itself has been partially pedestrianised and the west frontage, continuing around into George Street, appears to be a recent development.

historical background

This area incorporates the western part of the old burgh of Stranraer and the original little settlement of Stranraer, which stood on the west banks of a burn that followed the approximate line of the present South Strand Street and North Strand Street, entering Loch Ryan at the north-east end of Fisher Street **A**. Several bridges, both municipal and private, linked the east and west of the town. The main street, now George Street and Charlotte Street, was once called Cross Street, as it crossed the dividing burn. By the nineteenth century the burn was to be a source of disquiet to the authorities. It had been a natural disposal spot for rubbish from the sixteenth century onwards, and increasing manufactories and sewage in the nineteenth century exacerbated the problem. An assessment of the foul state of the burn for the Police Commissioners in 1887 highlighted the pollution and potential diseases arising from stagnant sewage.¹ An attempt to remove pigs from the dwellings near the burn in 1903 failed; there were still one hundred in the burgh in 1927. The problem of sanitation was not fully resolved until the 1930s, when modern sewage pipes were installed.

This settlement of Stranraer was, in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, quite distinct from Chapel, which stood to the east of the Town Burn (*see* pp 40–2). The first mention of the lands of ‘Stranreuer’ is in the early 1300s, when they were held by Fergus de Mandeville.² By 1513/14 they were under the control of Thomas McDowell,³ but McDowell authority over them was disputed from 1525 by a number of families, and the lands finally passed to Ninian Adair in 1591 or 1592.⁴ The Adairs of Kinhilt were a family with Irish origins who had arrived in Scotland in the thirteenth century, and already had considerable authority within Chapel (*see* p 15). How much settlement there was west of the Town Burn in the sixteenth century is unclear, although it was referred to as a ‘clauchane’, or small township, before it received burgh status in 1595.⁵ After this date, with the specific right to hold markets and trade freely,⁶ there was a slow, but steady, development of the area.

The most significant secular building in any burgh was the tolbooth, for it was here that market dues were collected, the town weights were kept, council meetings were held and often, as in the case of Stranraer, the town gaol was housed. The records suggest that Stranraer had a tolbooth soon after becoming a burgh. The first definite reference is in October 1597; but a torn folio in the earliest burgh court book indicates that a burgh court was held ‘in p...’, some time before October 1596. This very probably read ‘in pretorio’, that is ‘tolbooth’.⁷ Either the Adairs had great foresight in arranging for the building of the first tolbooth immediately on the granting of burgh status, or an existing building functioned as the earliest tolbooth. Certainly by 1618, it would appear that a building specifically intended as a tolbooth had been constructed, as it was used by this time as the town gaol and housed the stocks.⁸ Where precisely this tolbooth was sited is unknown, but ultimately a tolbooth, whether the same building or not is unclear, stood in the middle of George Street, at the head of both Church Street and Mid Vennel (the present Queen Street) **B** **figure 19**. This was a two-storey building with vaults beneath.⁹

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archaeological potential and future development **figure 22**

Development referred to in the most recent Local Plan (1988) includes street improvement schemes for George Street, infilling of gap sites in King Street and rehabilitation of properties in Fisher Street.

Little archaeological work has been carried out in this area, and few stray finds have been reported. However, the conversion of the old townhouse **C** to the new museum, one of the few archaeological opportunities which has so far presented itself, has established that good preservation of archaeological deposits does exist, sealed beneath the floor levels of later buildings. The burials discovered here are associated with the first parish church built in 1649 and give some clue as to the extent of the early kirkyard, which may continue out into George Street.

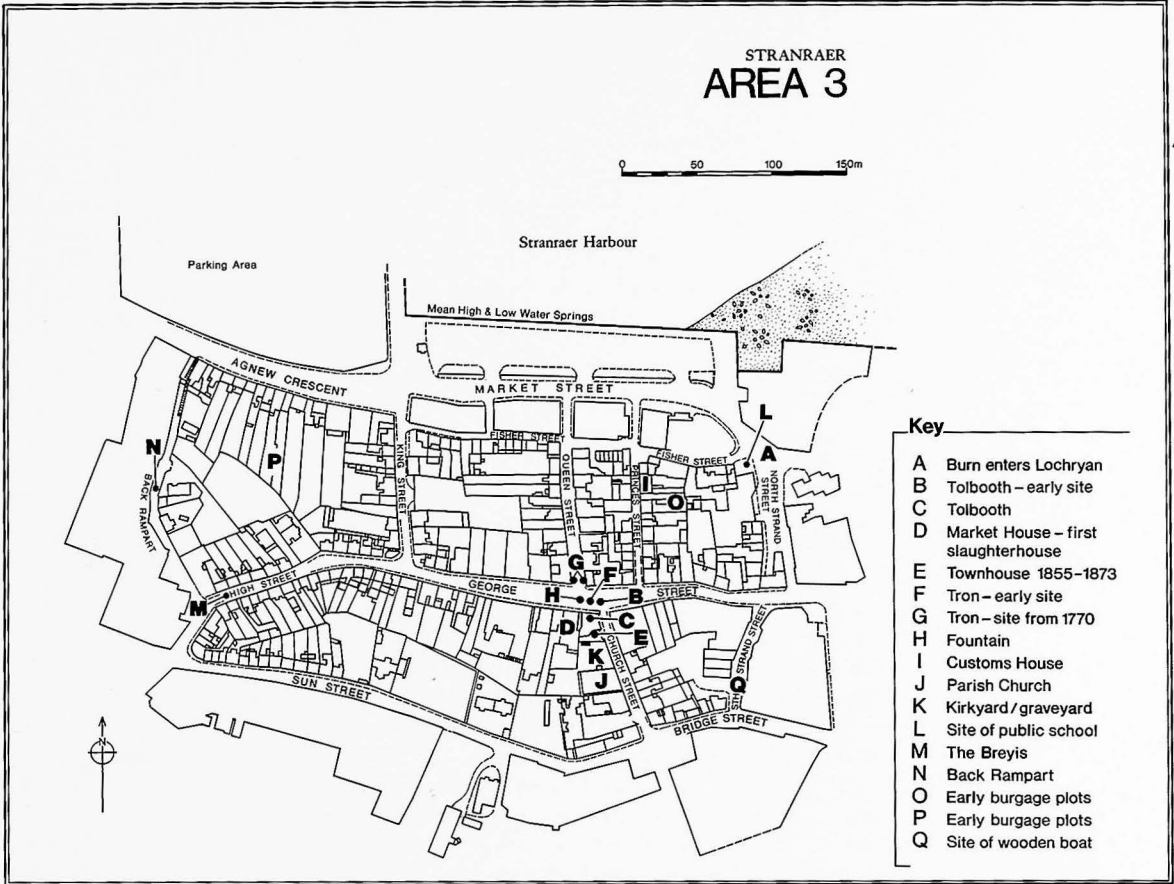


figure 18
Area 3

Parts of the two upper floors were used as a gaol, as well as council chambers, for in January 1772 Thomas Jelmfray requested to be moved to the ‘upper prison’ where there was a fireplace. His request was refused.¹⁰ Conditions were such that in the same year David McWilliam was released from the prison as he was starving and had no means of support whilst inside.¹¹ The tolbooth might even become a place of correction for young offenders. In 1776, the Council decided that the blasphemous behaviour of boys playing marbles and football near the tolbooth should be met with punishment within its doors.¹²

By 1770, it was decided that, to remove an obstruction to the thoroughfare, the tolbooth or townhouse should be re-sited. It was placed on the south side of George Street, completed in 1776, and in use by the following year C.¹³ By 1790, however, this new building was inadequate. The Council deemed that ‘to their regret... the new prison is insufficient, as it has been lately broken into’.¹⁴ In 1810, after the gaoler himself was gaoled for permitting a prisoner to escape, new regulations were laid down;¹⁵ but these proved still not to be enough, and the gaol was transferred to the castle (see p 53). A market house was built behind the townhouse in 1802, thus removing from it a further

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archaeology

The main street frontages, particularly George Street and North and South Strand Streets, must remain an archaeological priority, especially given the encouraging results from the new museum site. A cellar study was beyond the scope of this survey but, particularly along the main street frontages, approximately half the properties are expected to have cellars. Any ground disturbance of the streets and closes themselves must also be monitored, as sealed below them may be the remains of the most important features of the medieval townscape—the tolbooth, tron and market cross—of which no archaeological evidence exists as yet.

The resting-place of the ship or boat found in 1683, straddling the Town Burn, also has implications for this area. Its position was described as well beyond the spring tide and a considerable distance from the shore, both of which suggest that it was found towards the

function—that of collecting tolls or market tax. The market house also housed the local market and acted as the first slaughterhouse **D**. The eighteenth-century townhouse is still standing, serving now as the town museum. It was later replaced by another, abutting its rear wall, set in Church Street **E**. Built in 1855, to function as a court-room and corn exchange, it was superseded in 1873 by the town hall and court house in Lewis Street. After that it became a drill hall and armoury. From 1879, with the founding of a Fire Brigade, it also housed on its ground floor Stranraer's earliest, manually operated fire-fighting machines.

The burgh weighing scales, or tron, were a focus of commercial life. It was on them that all goods for sale at the town market were weighed. The first mention of the tron is in 1600, but there is no indication as to where it was sited.¹⁶ The first known site was in front of the tolbooth, and the tron remained in this position **F** until 1770, when it was decided by the Council that it should be removed and replaced by a new one 'to be erected at the side of the street at the head of the Middle Vennel'; but on which side of Mid Vennel is unclear **G**.¹⁷

An important feature of medieval and early modern burgh and market life was the town cross. Stranraer records give little information on this. There was certainly one in existence in 1663 when the details of a cloth market were to be proclaimed at the cross.¹⁸ In 1690, it was deemed by parliament that since the shire town of Wigtown was so far distant from some parts of the shire, poindings against the inhabitants of the Rhins might be announced at the cross of Stranraer.¹⁹ A fountain was erected to celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of Queen Victoria's accession, and this occupied the natural site of a town cross, in the middle of George Street **H**, until its recent removal to Castle Green. George Street and Charlotte Street were at one time called Cross Street, but this refers not to a market cross but to the fact that the main thoroughfare crossed the Town Burn. By 1843 the Customs House was sited in Princes Street **I**, close to the old market centre and what was to become the new market on the reclaimed foreshore (*see* p 38).

The present parish church was built in 1841 on a site close to the original, first built in 1649, according to the conditions laid down in the royal charter erecting Stranraer into a

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Bridge Street end of South Strand Street **Q**. As it lay transversely across the Town Burn, it falls into both Areas 2 and 3 of this study.

The hill (Sheuchan Ridge) which lies to the south of High Street/George Street must have restricted the development of the properties extending back from the main thoroughfare. As a result, it is likely that the early settlement comprised a narrow strip along the south side of George Street/High Street. The ruins of small two-roomed cottages were visible until recently, built into the hillside on artificial terraces behind George Street. These represent poor quality housing and their exact date of construction is uncertain.

Fisher Street marked the waterfront of the early settlement, but was no more than a back lane in the seventeenth century. With no recognised harbour then, it is doubtful whether any waterfront structures ever existed here. The archaeological monitoring of any development here would offer an opportunity to answer this question, and could also determine the nature of the property boundaries in this part of the burgh.

In contrast with Area 2, the survival of open gardens within Area 3 suggests that some of the original burgage plots may be fossilised in the layout of existing property boundaries. The blocks of properties between King Street and Back Rampart **P**, and those to the east of Princes Street **O**, are good examples of what may be late medieval burgage plots. Archaeological monitoring of any development here may confirm whether these are contemporary with the medieval settlement, and also determine the nature of backland use. The plots immediately to the east of Back Rampart, lying centrally between the High Street and Agnew Crescent frontages, are larger than other burgage plots in this block. This suggests that they are later infilling of what was initially undeveloped land within the burgh.

royal burgh.²⁰ This first building did not survive long, being replaced in 1694 **J**. The parish minister was not well endowed, the first manse and glebe being gifted by the Reverend Walter Laurey in 1736 in the form of a house and a garden for a manse and 30 acres in Leswalt for a glebe. By 1780, the second church was in a poor state of repair and a decision was taken to purchase some land adjoining the kirkyard (*see* p 19) to construct another. The costs of the land purchase and the building operations, which commenced in 1784, were met by the earl of Stair.²¹ According to the *Old Statistical Account*, this was a ‘commodious and even elegant church’,²² with a roof that by 1829 was in a dangerous state and requiring extensive repair, which was carried out by James Adair. Four years later it was deemed that the condition of the roof was beyond repair and the building could no longer safely house the congregation. The next few years were to see indecision, not only on the proposed site for a new church, but also on its funding: by the heritors or public subscription. The town Council was in straitened circumstances and the incumbent minister, David Wilson, was forced to sue it for payment of his stipend. The present church, accommodating between 800 and 900 people, was built on the same site and was consecrated in May 1841. The small remaining deficit was met by seat rents.²³

The kirkyard in Church Street was the first official burial ground **K**. How far to the north of the parish church the original burial ground extended is uncertain. Skeletal remains found under the tolbooth fronting George Street might, however, suggest that it stretched further north than the extant burial ground indicates. In 1788, plans were drawn up for a new burial ground in the kirkyard, and burial plots were sold there. This may mean that some of the old burial grounds had been lost with the building of the new tolbooth in 1776.²⁴

Stranraer may have had a number of schools, both private and ecclesiastical establishments, from early in the seventeenth century.²⁵ James Patersoune was noted as a schoolmaster of Stranraer when acting as a witness in 1614.²⁶ Schoolmasters were appointed annually, until in 1688 Alexander Grierson received a permanent appointment to ‘instruct all the weins and others that shall be put to the publick skool’.²⁷ The first known site of this town school was on the corner of Fisher Street and North

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previous archaeological work and chance finds

*Stranraer Museum NX 059 608**Disturbed burials*

A watching brief took place during alteration work in the ground floor of the former townhouse building, which was at one time part of Stranraer parish church graveyard. The excavation uncovered two adult skeletons from separate areas of the site. One skeleton was taken to Edinburgh by the police for medical examination and report and the other retained in the museum for re-burial in the local cemetery. *DES* (1989), 14.

Wooden boat NX 060 607 Q

A ‘ship’ was found in the town in 1683, a considerable distance from the shore and well above the highest of spring tides. The vessel, found lying transversely across a little burn when a mill watergate was being dug, was only partly removed—the remaining section was covered with soil to a considerable depth and kail was grown over one end. Described as ‘pretty large’, it was not built in local seventeenth-century fashion. Symson’s informants noted that ‘the boards were not joyn’d together after the usual fashion of our present ships or barks, as (*sic*) also that it had nails of copper’, suggesting that it was of some antiquity. The ‘copper nails’ indicate that the ship may even have been Roman rather than medieval; it was almost certainly *not* Viking. The burn is almost certainly the same water course as the stream which was covered over and diverted in 1845, and associated with the names Bridge Street, North and South Strand Streets and Burnfoot. A Symson, ‘A Large History of Galloway’, 1684. Printed in Mackenzie, *History of Galloway*, 83.

Strand Street L. By 1787, the Town Council concluded that 'the manner of conducting education in the burgh was defective' and, as part of the improvement process, the old school was replaced with a 'very convenient school and schoolhouse', at a cost of £80, on the same site as the previous school.²⁸ As late as 1787, this was considered to be 'quite in the country'.²⁹ A year later, a second schoolmaster was appointed to the school.³⁰ A number of other schools were in existence, such as the Penny-a-Week School founded in 1771, and by 1814 eight schools were officially recognised. With rising population in the nineteenth century, a number of new schools, including ragged schools for the poorer children, were established. The Council claimed proudly in 1850 that 'there was not a child under ten years of age in prisons'.³¹ The original burgh school and its ground at the corner of Fisher Street and North Strand Street L were sold in 1823 for £190.³² The original small settlement at Stranraer stretched only as far westwards as the mound or 'agger' called the Breyis M.³³ By the nineteenth century this area and the small village of Hillhead would be absorbed into the burgh proper, the main street extending into Hill Head Street (the present High Street). The geological configuration of the town is also reflected in the name 'Back Rampart' N, the western boundary of the Stranraer settlement, with the village of Clayhole beyond it.

Fisher Street forms the northern boundary to this area. Although by the nineteenth century it was a developed, if narrow, thoroughfare, it was in existence in the early seventeenth century when it functioned as a back lane.³⁴

notes

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|----|---|----|--|
| 1 | 'Report to the Police Commissioners of the Burgh of Stranraer, 5 August 1887'. In the keeping of Dumfries and Galloway Regional Council, Water and Sewerage Department. | 16 | MS ST/1/1/0, 28 October 1600. |
| | | 17 | MS ST/1/1/3, 110. |
| | | 18 | MS ST/1/1/0, 12 October 1663. |
| | | 19 | <i>APS</i> , ix, 200. |
| | | 20 | <i>RMS</i> , i, no 1665. |
| | | 21 | MS ST/1/1/4, 20, 141–2. |
| 2 | <i>RMS</i> , i, no 551, appendix ii, Robert I, index A, no 610. | 22 | <i>OSA</i> , v, 527. |
| 3 | <i>ER</i> , xiv, Appendix, Libri Responionum, 537. | 23 | N J Hunter, <i>Ane Kirk': History of the Parish Church and the Churches in Stranraer Today</i> (Wigtown District Museum Service, 1991), 16–17. |
| 4 | <i>The Castle of St John</i> , 4. | | |
| 5 | <i>RMS</i> , i, no 366. | 24 | MS ST/1/1/4, 9 January 1788, 14 January 1788. |
| 6 | <i>RMS</i> , i, no 424. | 25 | Boyd, <i>Stranraer</i> . |
| 7 | MS ST/1/1/0. | 26 | MS ST/1/7/0, fo 97v. |
| 8 | <i>RPC</i> , v, 329. | 27 | Boyd, <i>Stranraer</i> . |
| 9 | Boyd, <i>Stranraer</i> . | 28 | MS ST/1/1/4, 273 [the correct pagination is 373]. |
| 10 | MS ST/1/1/3, 158. | 29 | <i>Ibid</i> . |
| 11 | <i>Ibid</i> , 175. | 30 | <i>Ibid</i> , 5 April 1788. |
| 12 | <i>Ibid</i> , 216 [the correct pagination is 316]. | 31 | Boyd, <i>Stranraer</i> . |
| 13 | <i>Ibid</i> , 219 [the correct pagination is 319]. | 32 | <i>Stranraer: Interesting Historical Facts</i> , 5. |
| 14 | Boyd, <i>Stranraer</i> . | 33 | MS ST/1/7/5, fo 17. |
| 15 | <i>Ibid</i> . | 34 | MS ST/1/7/0, fo 89. |

the archaeological potential of Stranraer a summary **figure 22**

an overview

Stranraer has escaped the scale of redevelopment seen in so many historic burghs in recent years. As a result, there has been little opportunity to carry out any archaeological fieldwork and our knowledge of the archaeological potential of the burgh is limited. Nevertheless, excavations in many other Scottish towns, especially Perth and Aberdeen but also in some smaller towns, have demonstrated that medieval and later archaeological remains do often survive beneath a modern street frontage. Therefore, the site of any proposed ground disturbance or development along the main street frontages, and North and South Strand Streets in particular, must be accorded a high archaeological priority, and arrangements made for the site to be assessed, monitored and, if necessary, excavated in advance of the development scheme. Similarly, any proposed ground disturbance of the streets and wynds themselves (for instance, for essential repairs, access to services, or environmental improvements) should also be monitored routinely, because the remains of some of the most important features of the medieval townscape may be sealed beneath them—the tolbooth, tron and market cross, of which no archaeological evidence exists as yet, as well as the remains of earlier street levels.

Of necessity, this assessment of the archaeological potential has been made against a background of few previous opportunities for archaeological work. Thus, the conclusions and recommendations expressed here should be regarded as provisional; this survey will require periodic review in the light of results from any future campaigns of archaeological fieldwork (assessment, monitoring and excavation), and from other types of sub-surface investigations, such as engineers' bore-holes or other below ground surveys. It is thought that some bore-hole surveys have been carried out in recent years in Stranraer by commercial companies, but the results are difficult to access.

It is important to stress here that the survey area was limited to the core of historic Stranraer. There is a recognised, though unquantifiable, potential for the discovery of prehistoric, Roman and early Christian archaeological remains, both within and outwith the confines of the historic burgh. This potential is *not* considered or shown on **figure 22**.

Finally, the potential for archaeological features and deposits to be preserved both beneath the floors and within the structures of historic standing buildings in Stranraer (pp 53–7) must not be forgotten. That such a potential exists was demonstrated in the recent restoration work and associated archaeological investigations in Stranraer Castle. The archaeological potential of Stranraer's historic standing buildings is also *not* shown on **figure 22**, but the potential of individual historic buildings is considered in the next section.

Turning to the specific areas of Stranraer (as identified in this survey), parts of Areas 2 and 3 have definite archaeological potential, with Area 3 promising the best preserved backlands. However, it must be expected that pockets of archaeological deposits, some perhaps sizeable, could be preserved even within areas identified generally as having low (or unknown) potential. **figure 22** distinguishes between areas of known potential (shaded green) and unknown potential (shaded lighter green). **All green areas should be treated as potentially archaeologically sensitive.** The Castle of St John (shaded red) is a monument of national importance, and is protected by law; any proposed works here would require the consent of the Secretary of State for Scotland. Effectively redeveloped areas (shaded blue) are probably archaeologically sterile.

area 1

As this area represents nineteenth-century reclaimed land, there is nothing of medieval interest. The absence of a recognised harbour in the medieval period would also imply that there is unlikely to have been an early waterfront. Industry, however, was increasingly attracted to the new harbour and by the mid or late nineteenth century, this area accommodated woodyards (ship building yards), a gas works and a slaughterhouse.

Although much later in date than the historic core of the burgh, overall, Area 1 should be seen as an important industrial landscape and an integral part of Stranraer's history. The few remaining sites from this period with the potential for excavation would be of interest to industrial archaeologists, both as standing buildings and below ground remains. This industrial archaeology interest should be taken into account if environmental improvements are envisaged in this area in the future.

area 2

The only archaeological work which has been carried out in this area has taken place within the Castle of St John itself, where the results were very encouraging. This monument of national importance is protected by law, and any proposed works here would require the consent of the Secretary of State for Scotland. The area immediately around the castle, and specifically the area immediately south of the castle, where a few nineteenth-century buildings survive in a state of disrepair, should be regarded as archaeologically sensitive and offers reasonable potential for the survival of archaeological deposits and features.

With much of the area to the east of St John's Street developed after the late eighteenth century, and the area between Castle Street and St John's Street having undergone much development in recent years, the archaeological potential of Area 2 is concentrated around the western end. This is the heart of the late medieval settlement of Chapel. Evidence of the early settlement may perhaps survive here, possibly clustered along the eastern bank of the Town Burn (now the east frontages of both North and South Strand Streets). Any further development here must be monitored closely.

area 3

Little archaeological work has been carried out in this area and few stray finds have been reported. However, the conversion of the old townhouse to the new museum, one of the very few archaeological opportunities which has so far presented itself, has established that good preservation of archaeological deposits does exist, sealed beneath the floor levels of later buildings. The main street frontages, particularly George Street and North and South Strand Streets, must therefore remain an archaeological priority.

The hill (Sheuchan Ridge) which lies to the south of High Street/George Street must have restricted the development of the properties extending back from the main thoroughfare. As a result, it is likely that the early settlement comprised a narrow strip along the south side of George Street/High Street, while development on the north side was not so restricted.

Fisher Street marked the waterfront of the early settlement, but was no more than a back lane in the seventeenth century. With no recognised harbour then, it is doubtful whether any waterfront structures ever existed here. The archaeological monitoring of any development here would offer an opportunity to answer this question, and could also determine the nature of the property boundaries in this part of the burgh.

In contrast with Area 2, the survival of open gardens within Area 3 suggests that some of the original burgage plots may be fossilised in the layout of existing property boundaries. The blocks of properties between King Street and Back Rampart, and those to the east of Princes Street, are good examples of what may be late medieval burgage plots. Archaeological monitoring of any development here may confirm whether these are contemporary with the medieval settlement, and also determine the nature of backland use. The plots immediately to the east of Back Rampart, lying centrally between the High Street and Agnew Crescent frontages, are larger than other burgage plots in this block. This suggests that they may be a later infilling of what was initially undeveloped land within the burgh.

historic buildings and their archaeological potential

A few buildings provide physical clues to Stranraer's historic past. Archaeological material is likely to be preserved both beneath and within these standing buildings, and may survive either as a sequence of floor levels or as deposits which predate the construction of the buildings themselves, or concealed within the upstanding structures.

The *Castle of St John* is probably the sole pre-Reformation remnant in the central area of the town **figure 7** & **figure 17: E**. Although a small chapel which stood nearby gave its name to the settlement on the east side of the burn that runs through Stranraer to Loch Ryan (approximately along the line of the present South Strand Street and North Strand Street), it was the castle that would become the focal point for sixteenth-century settlement in both Chapel and Stranraer. Built around 1520 by the Adair of Kinhilt family, it was to function not only as a home but also as an administrative centre for the Adair territory; and its protective aura, as well as its needs for services and supplies, would have encouraged a clustering of settlement around it.

An L-shaped, fortified house, its original entrance in the north wall gives access to two vaulted chambers. An entresol is entered from the wheel-stair, and above this, on the first floor, one large vaulted apartment has two chambers in the thickness of the west wall. Alterations have been made over the centuries, commencing in the seventeenth century when the building was heightened. It was to remain a family home, in the possession of the Adairs, followed by the Kennedys, and then by the Dalrymples of Stair. During the latter's ownership, the castle was used as a billet for Graham of Claverhouse during his offensive against Galloway Covenanters, an indication not only of the Covenanting sympathies of the Dalrymples, but also the relative standing and possible comfort of the castle. After this, major modifications were made. In the nineteenth century the castle's two upper floors became a gaol, with an open parapeted roof for an exercise area. The trappings of the gaol are still in evidence: chains, iron doors and prisoners' graffiti—a sharp reminder of the building's past. By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the castle had become hemmed in by stone buildings and it functioned as a store room throughout much of the twentieth century. Clearance of surrounding buildings, rehabilitation of the fabric and conversion to a museum have brought the castle back to dominance over the surrounding modern settlement.

The Castle of St John is the only Scheduled Ancient Monument in Stranraer. Although further restoration work is unlikely in the foreseeable future, Scheduled Monument Consent (SMC) would be required before more refurbishment or any proposal involving ground disturbance could take place. Recent archaeological work in the two ground floor cellars and the main hall in advance of restoration in 1979, and again in 1989, revealed a number of earlier features. These included stone floors and drains as well as blocked up mural passages and a prison-pit. Beyond removing the original stone floors to reveal features pre-dating the construction of the castle, the potential for further archaeological discoveries is limited. However, more hidden architectural detail could be expected elsewhere in the building.

Nearby, in George Street, stands the *old townhouse*, completed in 1776 **figure 19** & **figure 18: C**. A fine example of a late eighteenth-century tolbooth, in spite of the claim of a visitor in 1877 that it was a 'very plain edifice' and 'like some ladies very much indebted to paint for its good looks', this two-storeyed building has a symmetrical front with an arched doorway set in the middle, an octagonal steeple and circular windows. The ground floor housed two shops, one now an entrance to the museum. It was in the tolbooth that the tolls, or taxes, for the use of the market were collected, the town weights were kept, the town gaol was housed (until its removal to the castle), and the Council meetings took place. Attached at the rear, in Church Street, is a later town hall building. The tolbooth had been extended to the south by a market house in 1802 **figure 18: D** and this, with later ranges surrounding a triangular courtyard, was replaced in 1855 by a large corn exchange with a court-room on the upper floor **figure 18: E**. The site of the old tolbooth or town hall reflects the dominant role it played in the life of the burgh and the townspeople—at the market place, the focal point of burgh life.

figure 19
Tolbooth
and Jubilee Fountain



Despite the complex history of this building, the site on which it stands is perhaps more important from an archaeological perspective. This was originally part of the graveyard of the old parish church, originally built in 1649, re-built in 1694, and replaced again in 1841; the discovery of two burials below the existing floor level during alteration work in 1989 confirms its location. Any further development here is highly likely to reveal more burials, and perhaps floor levels associated with the eighteenth-century tolbooth.

On the other corner of Church Street and George Street another building, the *George Hotel*, reflects another aspect of late eighteenth-century Stranraer life **figure 20**. Stranraer was a staging post for the short crossing from Scotland to Ireland. This fine coaching inn may once have been the home of the Stairs, but by the late eighteenth century it had become a hostelry for wealthy travellers. With a three-storeyed symmetrical façade, it remains an elegant building, with its stable entrance (essential in the days of horse-drawn coaches) still to be seen in Church Street. It was said in the nineteenth century by a visitor to the town that it had ‘capital accommodation for both man and beast’.

Across George Street stands yet another hostelry—the *Golden Cross*. It bears the date 1805, but its deeds suggest that this crow-stepped gabled building was erected around 1780, and that it, too, served to accommodate travellers to and from the Stranraer-Ireland crossing.

Street frontages have, in the light of recent excavations elsewhere, been the most rewarding in terms of the preservation of archaeological deposits, despite the problem of cellarage. Although there has been no opportunity to examine the High Street frontage or any of the other main street frontages in Stranraer, evidence of medieval structures in the form of post-holes and floor surfaces may be expected, sealed beneath the nineteenth-century standing buildings. Recent excavations in Perth, Dunfermline and Arbroath have shown that the width and alignment of the main streets in those burghs have changed over the centuries. Earlier cobbled street surfaces and buildings can be preserved up to three or four metres behind the modern street frontage.

A number of imposing houses indicate Stranraer’s increasing prosperity in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. *Park House*, a three-storeyed, symmetrical building, stands to the south of Leswalt High Road. There is a possibility that in origin it is partly seventeenth century and was refurbished in the eighteenth, when it was the dower house of the Agnews of Lochnaw. Its stables and gateposts also reflect its status as a country residence of distinction.

At the other end of the town, *Ivy House* **figure 17: H** on London Road (the west section being originally named Hanover Street), now a restaurant called L’Aperitif, is an eighteenth-century, two-storeyed house with a symmetrical façade and centre pediment.

Nearby, at the east end of Charlotte Street, stands nineteenth-century *Bellevilla House* **figure 17: F**. On Bellevilla Road, *Ann House* **figure 17: G** was nearing completion in 1815: an apprentice joiner working on the internal wood panelling learned here of Britain’s success over Napoleon in the Battle of Waterloo.

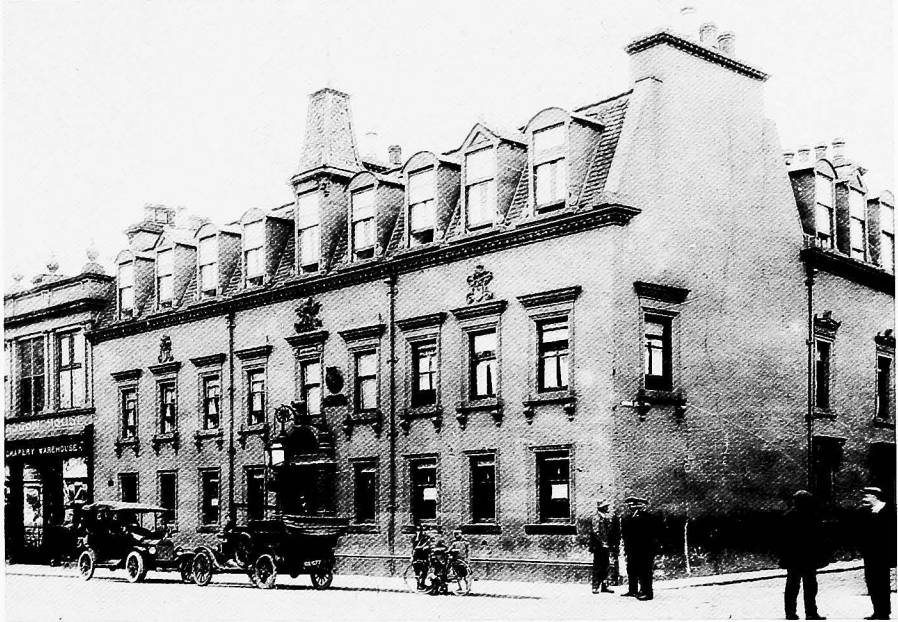


figure 20

The George Hotel,
as rebuilt in 1876

A little further east of Bellevilla House, *North West Castle* **figure 17: 1**, so called after its owner Sir John Ross who searched for the north-west passage, was built around 1820. For some time during the nineteenth century it was known as ‘Observatory House’, perhaps after the camera obscura Ross had built on one of the towers. The lower windows of the house, on the north side, with their small opening panes for insertion of a telescope, and boat house door lintel still visible, are a reminder of the proximity of the sea before infilling in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries transformed this area.

All of these four latter houses were built on land once at the extremities of the town—on the old Fay of Chapel and beyond, an area once countryside, but now urban.

Other buildings still standing are testament to Stranraer’s past. The parish church, or *Old Church* **figure 18: J**, known locally as ‘the old parish church’ or ‘the old parish’, was built in 1841 on Church Street. It is virtually on the site of the original, erected in 1649. The parish of Stranraer was carved out of the parishes of Leswalt and Inch, and sits as a small enclave between the two. One of the conditions imposed at the granting of burgh status was that the town should provide itself with its own church. The 1841 stone-built replacement of the original is of Gothic design, with an ashlar-buttressed front to the street; it was described, somewhat harshly, by McIlwraith in 1877 as ‘having very little pretensions to architectural attractions’. Perhaps of greater interest is the nearby *graveyard*. This was the first town kirkyard, and tombstones date from the seventeenth century. Set on the west wall of the churchyard is a roughly-finished stone, a memorial to Andro Hervy, chapman and possibly bailie, with the partly-legible date ‘169?’.

Although major development here is unlikely, alterations within the standing building or in the grounds of the church, for example the insertion of new services, may reveal the remains of the earlier 1649, and the 1694 structures.

The *High Kirk* of Stranraer on Leswalt High Road, built two years after the 1841 parish church, is an imposing building with a fine bell tower. It once served as the Sheuchan church and is a reminder that the modern burgh of Stranraer is, in effect, an amalgamation of several smaller settlements. The many other church buildings, such as the *Masonic Hall* in Sun Street, built as a church in 1843, reflect the proliferation of places of worship as secession from the established church increased.

The growing wealth of Stranraer in the nineteenth century may be noted in the arrival of banking establishments and the quality of their buildings. The *Bank of Scotland* (formerly Union Bank) in Church Street, built in 1837, is a three-storeyed building with a doorway with fluted columns and cornice that reveals, in spite of its present somewhat decayed condition, a remnant of its past. Nearby, *Dunbae House*, an imposing building set back from the street, was used as the City of Glasgow Bank from 1832 **figure 21**. The ground-floor window on the left carries an interesting reminder of its days as a bank. This is a small



figure 21
Dunbae House

glass peep-hole, cut into the bottom of the window frame, to enable those approaching the bank to be recognised. The building now houses the Wigtown District Council offices, and is in a better state of repair than its neighbour.

In amongst modern development there are sudden reminders of the past. Along Charlotte Street, what was called *Strand House*, now Petrucci's cafeteria and takeaway, retains its old character, with an arched pend leading to North Strand Street. This arch resulted, as in many other destroyed cases, from permission to build over the burn, as long as public access was maintained. This vennel was named Logan's Close. Any development or refurbishment here may expose the burn and perhaps any structures along the bank side.

Nearby, *Maxwell House* at no 32, a nineteenth-century house set back from the later building line of its neighbours, has a pedimented doorway with painted crest above ('Reverisco'). The stonework at first floor level gives a hint of being a later extension (1950s), the house originally having had no upper floor, but a central tower. Further west, 5 and 7 *High Street* display the façades of traditional two-storeyed houses. That at no 5 has the date 1726 on the gable. The date was placed here c 1946–7, based on information found in the title deeds to the property.

Lewis Street also has buildings displaying a certain gentility of former days. 21–25 *Lewis Street* (no 23 now being the Registrar's office) are attractive two-storeyed houses with door and window cornices, as is the office of *Ferguson & Forester*, solicitors, on the other side of the road, with its arched dormers and steps leading to the main door. This was originally the home of John Henry Lewis Taylor, whose family owned most of the land within the burgh on either side of Stoneykirk Road, and after whom the street was renamed, as Lewis Street, in the 1820s.

Nearer the loch, 10/12 *King Street*, now a bed and breakfast establishment, retains its original dormers and classical pilasters and entablature at its entrance. On reclaimed land, probably with the south side of the street on the higher part of the original beach, 10 *Market Street*, a two-storeyed Georgian house, now the residence of both the local Department of Trading Standards and Reporter to the Children's Panel, manages to retain a little of its original dignity. It was built as a licensed hotel and known as *The Queen's Arms*. The main entrance, as today, was in Market Street and a side entrance in Queen Street gave access to the public bar. Although blocked up, traces of the doorway remain in the east wall. An interesting late nineteenth-century building faces up *North*

Strand Street. Two-storeyed, with a symmetrical front and centre archway and two doorways, one now blocked, it stands on the site of Adair's woodyard, between Fisher Street and Harbour Street and now functions as a store for Scottish Power.

Wellington House, on the south side of Fisher Street, is an attractive, ashlar-fronted building, built as the home attached to the Stranraer brewery. It stood with its back to the sea-front, facing south. It later became the Customs House for Stranraer, and a sandstone addition on the west side, constructed sometime before 1881, was the office of the British Linen Bank. It gives a clue to the quality of some of the nineteenth-century dwellings in Stranraer. *Fisher Street* itself, as a whole, reveals perhaps the only remaining evidence of the narrowness of earlier streets and their dependent properties, although this would be extensive compared with many old closes in Stranraer. A remnant *building at the rear of Fisher Street*, visible from the car park approached from King Street, is one of the few standing reminders of the closeness of building in the old core of the burgh.

Stranraer's present status is reflected in its standing buildings. Its 'new' red sandstone *town hall*, built in 1872-3, for example, is testament to the civic desire to overcome financial difficulties in establishing Stranraer as the most important west-coast crossing port to Ireland. The *Hanover Square* and surrounding modern developments conceal the late nineteenth and twentieth-century squalor and jerry-building that was the home for many Irish immigrants, and are an indication of a new, more enlightened thinking. But it is the *piers*, the *ferry terminal complex* and its supporting buildings that probably most characterise twentieth-century Stranraer.

further work

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Stranraer is particularly fortunate in possessing burghal records dating back to the founding of the burgh. Although considerable use has been made of these early records for the purpose of this survey, time has not permitted a full assessment. The **burgh's relationship to the superior in the years before 1617**, when Stranraer became a royal burgh, would merit careful study.

Although *The Royal and Ancient Burgh of Stranraer*, by J.S. Boyd (written with the assistance of Mr D. Nelson), holds considerable detail on historic Stranraer, it commences only in 1617, and sources are not given. It is clear from research work for this survey that much of it is based on primary unprinted sources, which merit full referencing. It is recommended that this should be undertaken as soon as the opportunity arises.

The **nature of the Irish immigrant community** in Stranraer deserves further study. In particular, the role of the Irish in the town's textile industry in the nineteenth century would be a good research topic. It might be fruitful to ask whether the Irish immigrants functioned merely as an unskilled labour force, or whether they performed a more advisory or supervisory role, given the undoubted skills of many Irish people in the textile trade.

archaeological objectives for the future

Preparation of the Stranraer burgh survey has highlighted a number of directions for future archaeological work. These can be broadly divided into management objectives and priorities for future fieldwork. Any such list cannot be exhaustive but it should cover the main areas of concern in the foreseeable future.

management objectives

- Wherever possible, it is important to continue to monitor the impact of any development (in its broadest sense) on the potential archaeological resource (the light and dark green areas on **figure 22**). This will require the routine provision of site-specific desk-based assessments, through to watching briefs, trial excavations and, where necessary, controlled excavation, post-excavation analysis and publication. Over time, the cumulative results will 'calibrate' this assessment of the archaeological potential of the burgh, providing evidence about the burgh's origins, and its physical, economic and social development through the centuries.
- Developments should similarly be monitored to shed more light on prehistoric and early medieval Stranraer and its immediate environs.
- The degree and nature of cellarage along the main street frontages was not systematically examined during preparation of this report. About half the properties are thought to be cellared but more accurate information would be most useful to managers/curators of the archaeological resource in assessing the archaeological potential of the main street frontages in the burgh.
- Engineers' bore-holes can offer a convenient glimpse of the depth and nature of sub-surface deposits, man-made or not, ancient and modern. It would be useful if the results obtained from any engineers' bore-holes in and around the core of the historic burgh could be collected and collated. It can prove difficult to access all bore-hole results, especially those in the hands of private contractors, and it might be worth considering mechanisms by which such information could more easily (and preferably routinely) be made available to managers/curators of the archaeological resource.

archaeology

- Opportunities should continue to be taken to increase public awareness of the potential archaeological interest of Stranraer, both generally and within and beneath historic standing buildings. This survey represents an important first step in this direction.
- Periodic review and updating of this survey would be desirable to take account of the results of any future archaeological work, and of the comprehensive collection and collation of other types of sub-surface investigations *eg.* engineers' bore-holes, systematic survey of cellarage on the main street frontages *etc.* In particular, the colour-coded map **figure 22** could perhaps be revised and re-issued at appropriate intervals.

priorities for future fieldwork

So little archaeological work has so far been undertaken in Stranraer that the priorities for future archaeological fieldwork are fairly rudimentary. However, the following priorities should be borne in mind during preparation of future project designs.

- Locate the boundaries of the early settlements of Chapel and Stranraer respectively (Areas 2 and 3); define their layout and nature; define their physical relationship to each other, including the location of any traces of bridges.
- Locate the precise position of the early chapel and waulkmill; ascertain their nature and date (Area 2 **figure 17.B–D**)
- Define the limits of the medieval burgh and the character and date of any burgh boundaries; in particular, test the hypothesis of this survey that the steep slope to the south of High Street/George Street (Area 3) was a limiting factor in the southward development of the burgh.
- Identify any sequence of planning in the layout and expansion of the burgh, and determine any variation in street alignment and width.
- Assess the nature of the few surviving burgage plots, particularly the better preserved ones to the east of Back Rampart (Area 3 **figure 18.P**).
- Investigate the extent of the kirkyard of the parish church, Church Street (Area 3 **figure 18.J**); more generally, ascertain whether any remains of earlier structures survive in the vicinity of the present church, including traces of the seventeenth-century church/es.
- Examine the hypothesis of this survey that no formal or recognised harbour existed before the nineteenth century in Stranraer; examine the nature of any surviving early waterfront along Fisher Street (Area 3).
- Relocate and, if possible, recover any remains of the wooden ship or boat recorded in the late seventeenth century (Area 2 **figure 17.T**).

Mesolithic period

flint scraper NX 06 60

A late Larnian flint scraper from the raised beach at Stranraer, and illustrated by Lacaille, is now in the National Museum of Antiquities. A D Lacaille, *The Stone Age in Scotland* (1954), 155.

flints NX 06 60

Microburins are reported from the early post-glacial beach at Stranraer. Lacaille, *Stone Age*, 144, 153–4.

shell midden NX 0627 6040

A substantial oyster midden has been revealed, once in about 1930 and again in 1960, in the region of the Dalrymple Street/Academy Street/Edinburgh Road Crossing, during Post Office cable-laying. It stretches over a length of at least 150 feet (46 m) and is 30 feet (9 m) in width; its upper surface lies at 34 feet (10.3 m) OD. A small wooden wheel and a large nodule of flint were found on its surface. In 1960, Post Office personnel dug a trench which ran along the pavement on the south side of Edinburgh Road. Traces of 'kitchen midden' were identified c 2 feet (61 cm) below the pavement level. It is believed that the midden extended southwards beneath no 2a Edinburgh Road. *DES* (1960), 41.

flints NX 09 60

An assemblage of eight flints was found in the Stranraer area. J.M. Coles, 'New aspects of the Mesolithic settlement of south west Scotland', *TDGNHAS*, 3rd ser, xli (1962–3), 67–98.

flint scraper NX 079 611

Triangular scraper of grey flint, worked on one edge only. *DES* (1966), 45.

flint blade (no NGR)

Found in a garden at Rowanshill on a new housing estate. *DES* (1965), 42.

flints NX 0738 6040—0774 6060

Several hundred flints, including both tools and waste material, were found between Aird Donald Caravan park and Old Bridge of Aird. *The Archaeological Sites and Monuments Series*, xxvi, East Rhins, Wigtown District, Dumfries and Galloway Region (RCAHMS, 1987), 7.

flints NX 089 605

Numerous flints, including microliths, were found on the east and south sides of a promontory which projects into the west side of Auchrocher moss. *Archaeological Sites and Monuments Series*, xxvi, 7.

flints NX 088 600

Flints were found on a level hill top 700 m west-south-west of Aird. *Archaeological Sites and Monuments Series*, xxvi, 7.

flints NX 091 610

Numerous flints were collected from the fields on both sides of the public road 250 m south-west of Clachnapluck. *Archaeological Sites and Monuments Series*, xxvi, 7.

flints NX 0884 6085

Several thousand flints, including waste material and a wide range of tool types, were found in a field 37 m south-east of Inch Park Croft. *Archaeological Sites and Monuments Series*, xxvi, 7.

flints NX 086 614

Numerous flints have been collected from around the edges of an area of low-lying ground 150 m north of Inch Park Croft. *Archaeological Sites and Monuments Series*, xxvi, 7.

flints NX 068 606

A flint core and utilised flake were found at Stair Park. *DES* (1984), 5.

Neolithic period

stone axe NX 062 603

A stone axe found in this area is now in Stranraer Museum. *TDCNHAS*, 3rd ser, xlvii (1979), 118.

stone axe NX 09 60

A stone axe was reported to have been found in or near Stranraer. *PPS*, xxx (1964), 55.

stone axe NX 09 60

A battle-axe of weathered greenstone was found in the Stranraer area. *PSAS*, xxx (1895–6), 65.

Bronze Age

bronze spearhead NX 06 60

A middle Bronze Age type spearhead found in this locality is now in St Albans museum. *PSAS*, xcvi (1963–4), 144.

spearhead NX 06 60

Leaf-shaped spearhead with rivet hole at the base of the socket, found near Stranraer c1895. *PSAS*, xxx (1895–6), 7.

spearheads NX 06 60

A group of late Bronze Age spearheads, seemingly from a small hoard near Stranraer, formed part of a late nineteenth-century private collection. *DES* (1968), 46.

bronze axe NX 06 60

Flat bronze axe of early Bronze Age type. *PSAS*, ci (1968–9), 86.

Bronze Age burial NX 0846 6179

A Cinerary Urn burial, with grave goods, was discovered during ploughing at Sandmill Farm in the early 1940s. The burial consisted of a Collared Urn, inverted in the burial pit, which contained wood ash, cremated adult bone fragments, a ceremonial stone battle axe, a blade of a bronze razor, a fragment of a decorated bone pin and three shaped whetstones. *PSAS*, lxxvi (1941–2), 79–83.

urns NX 0746 6027

Some clay urns, 'about the size of coffee cups' with herring-bone pattern on the outside near the rim, were found in 1859–60, a little to the east of the signal box at Stranraer Station. The urns, which had crumbled to pieces, were found mouth down on a slate-like slab; inside one were found jet beads which are now in the National Museum of Antiquities. A Morrison, 'Cinerary urns and pygmy vessels in south-west Scotland', *TDCNHAS*, 3rd ser, xiv (1967–8), 80–140.

cairn NX 0985 6193

A cairn stands here. RCAHMS National Monuments Record of Scotland no NX 06 SE 8.

cairn NX 0967 6150

A cairn once stood here but no trace of it survives today. RCAHMS National Monuments Record of Scotland no NX 06 SE 9.

Iron Age and Roman period

enclosure NX 0975 6006

A palisaded settlement, measuring 48 by 37 m, was identified by aerial photography, with a circular structure, 10 m in diameter, situated in the centre. *Archaeological Sites and Monuments Series*, xxvi, 24.

quernstone NX 0858 6069

The upper half of a quernstone was found at this spot. RCAHMS National Monuments Record of Scotland no NX 06 SE 14.

spindle whorl NX 052 617

A spindle whorl, made of green mudstone and decorated on both sides, was found in a garden of a house in West End Terrace. *DES* (1966), 45.

Roman coin hoard NX 09 60

Up to fifty coins are reputed to have been found on a nearby army base, only one of which was reported. *PSAS*, lxxxiv (1949–50), 151.

Innernessan NX 0835 6320

Alleged site of the Roman town 'Rerigonium' (Stranraer is another possible candidate). Nothing can be seen on the ground. A L F Rivet & C Smith, *The Place Names of Roman Britain* (London, 1979), 425.

Early Christian period

quern NX 06 60

A quern found in this area was perforated in its centre by a 3 inch (75 mm) hole, and decorated on the upper surface with an incised cross. *PSAS*, xiii (1878–9), 172–3.

incised cross NX 045 617

A stone with an incised cross, said to have been found about 400 m north-west of Larg Liddesdale farmhouse, is now in Stranraer Museum. The stone, an irregularly shaped pillar (0.57 m high, up to 0.20 m wide and 0.13 m thick), bears the outline of a cross with a slightly swollen shaft, rounded head, and wedge-shaped arms defined by lines radiating from a central hollowed boss. On both flanks of the stone there is a simple Latin cross. RCAHMS National Monuments Record of Scotland no NX 06 SW 4.

medieval period

wooden boat NX 060 607

A 'ship' was found in the town in 1683, a considerable distance from the shore and well above the highest of spring tides. The vessel, found lying transversely across a little burn when a mill watergate was being dug, was only partly removed—the remaining section was covered with soil to a considerable depth and kail was grown over one end. Described as 'pretty large', it was not built in local seventeenth-century fashion. Symson's informants noted that 'the boards were not joyn'd together after the usual fashion of our present ships or barks, as (*sic*) also that it had nails of copper', suggesting that it was of some antiquity. The 'copper nails' indicate that the ship may even have been Roman rather than medieval; it was almost certainly *not* Viking. The burn is almost certainly the same water course as the stream which was covered over and diverted in 1845, and associated with the

names Bridge Street, North and South Strand Streets and Burnfoot. A Symson, 'A Large History of Galloway', 83.

Stranraer Castle NX 061 608

Cellars, drain, etc Excavation took place within the two cellars in 1979, in advance of restoration of the structure. Although the cellars were filled with early modern deposits, they overlay two finely cobbled floor surfaces. An open drain in the west cellar suggested that it had been used to accommodate livestock. Excavation demonstrated that the west cellar had not contained a kitchen fireplace. Further fieldwork may prove the existence of original mural stairs in the west wall of the castle.

During the consolidation work, the remains of two blocked-up mural passages and a prison-pit behind the main hall fireplace were revealed. DES (1979), 6.

Stranraer Castle NX 060 608

Three areas were excavated prior to the refurbishment of the castle as a heritage centre. In the main hall, a small inner chamber at the rear of the fireplace was cleared of about 0.9 m of earth and bird droppings, to reveal two stone steps. The wooden floor in front of the chamber was removed and, after clearing about 0.3 m of debris and a modern cement step, the original stone slabbing was revealed.

In the main hall, a small section (0.71 x 0.51 m) of flooring from the centre of the room was cleared and the area below excavated. Pieces of oyster shell and a bird bone were recovered.

In the ground floor entrance area, a section (1.16 x 1.70 m) was excavated to reveal a floor level, at a depth of 0.21 m, and a section of drainage channel. No finds were recorded. DES (1989), 15.

Stranraer Museum NX 059 608

disturbed burials A watching brief took place during alteration work in the ground floor of the former townhouse building. This was at one time the site of the graveyard of Stranraer parish church. Two adult skeletons were excavated from two areas of the site. One skeleton was taken to Edinburgh by the police for medical examination and report. The other was retained in the museum for re-burial in the adjacent cemetery. DES (1989), 14.

St John's Well NX 0564 6106

This well, which was probably dedicated to St John the Baptist, is a fresh-water spring considerably below the high water mark. It was noticed in c 1916 still bubbling through the sand. Its name is derived from the Knights Hospitallers of St John, who owned land in the thirteenth century now occupied by the burgh of Stranraer. Excavation nearby has interfered with the spring and the well has run dry. No trace of any well or spring can now be seen on the ground. J R Walker, 'Holy wells in Scotland', *PSAS*, xvii (1882-3), 152-210, 192.

mortar NX 0557 6068—0590 6050

A mortar or indoor domestic basin, possibly medieval, was dug up at the Sun Street Housing Scheme, Murrayfield. The flat-based vessel, of solid grey sandstone, and measuring over 10 inches (25 cm) in diameter and 7 inches (18 cm) in height, was discovered at a depth of 4 feet (1.2 m) in a pipe trench. The basin, which showed little sign of use, was inverted and contained a thin layer of carbonised wood. *TDCNHAS*, 3rd ser, xii (1953), 41-93.

chapel, Sandmill NX 074 613

Supposed site of a spring, though no trace is visible today. RCAHMS National Monuments Record of Scotland no NX 06 SE 43.

street names

This index includes streets outwith the areas discussed in this survey if they are of local interest. If a street is within one of the three *areas* reviewed above, indication is given.

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- Academy Street Stranraer Academy, demolished in the 1980s, formed the southern boundary of this street.
- Agnew Crescent *Area 1*
Named after a local property-owner, it lies within the smaller settlement of Clayhole. A row of houses on the seaward side of Agnew Crescent was once part of Neptune Street, which name referred to both sides of the street as far as Back Rampart. Clayhole was one of several small settlements originally outwith the limits of the early town, but later swallowed up by it as it expanded (*see also* Hillhead and Tradeston). The name, still used for the Agnew Street–Sheuchan Street area, recalls that at one time there were claypits there which were used for making bricks.
- Back Rampart *Area 3*
A narrow vennel which descends steeply towards the shore of the loch. It traditionally formed the western limit of the town, beyond which lay the settlement of Clayhole.
- Bellevilla Road *Area 2*
Refers to Bellevilla House. Traditionally the eastern limit of the town, in the area originally named the Far Fay. Far Fay crops up from time to time in early council minutes, with implications that it was far from the town or its centre.
- Bridge Street *Area 2*
Had one of the three main bridges across the Town Burn (covered over between the 1840s and the 1860s).
- Burn's Close *Area 3*
A close, which has since disappeared, that ran off George Street.
- Canse's Close *Area 3*
A close, which has since disappeared, that ran off George Street. William Canse owned the property at its junction with George Street.
- Castle Court *Area 2*
As a result of road widening, has disappeared from the front of the castle.
- Castle Street *Area 2*
The Castle of St John lies immediately to the west. Originally known as Castle Alley.
- Chapel Street *Area 2*
This marked the eastern boundary of the chapel croft of the original burgh of Stranraer. Renamed Thistle Street.
- Charlotte Street *Area 2*
One of several street names in the town in which is displayed loyalty to the crown or the esteem in which the royal family was

held. George III (1738–1820) married Charlotte of Mecklenburg–Strelitz in 1761.

- Church Street *Area 3*
The parish church is in this street.
- Craig's Loaning Named after a local family.
- Cross Street *Areas 2 and 3*
Probably the second oldest street in the town, this crossed the line of the burn along Strand Street (later divided into North and South Strand Streets). After a market cross had been erected farther west along Cross Street, the street was renamed Charlotte Street, although the street name has no connection with the market cross.
- Dalrymple Street Named after the Dalrymples, the family name of the Earls of Stair, Lochinch Castle.
- Fisher Street *Area 3*
The burgh school was located in Fisher Street, which was named after local fishermen.
- Gala's Tenement William Gala was a local landowner. The name has since disappeared from the centre of the town.
- George Street *Area 3*
One of several street names in the town in which is displayed loyalty to the crown or the esteem in which the royal family was held.
- Glebe Street Originally The Foulford—a reference to the stream which crossed the lowest part of the roadway. Ground in the area was left by Reverend Walter Laurey to his successors as parish ministers of Stranraer to provide a glebe.
- Glen street *Area 2*
Leading to Glenwell Park.
- Hanover Street *Area 2*
One of several street names in the town in which is displayed loyalty to the crown or the esteem in which the royal family was held.
- Harbour Street *Area 2*
This street was established after the harbour was developed in the nineteenth century.
- High Street *Area 3*
The main street.
- Hillhead Street Leading to Hillhead, one of several small settlements outwith the limits of the early town but later swallowed up as it expanded. Hillhead, which comprised the area around Glebe Street, denoted the dwellings built on the sheltered side of Sheuchan ridge, the hill which overlooked Stranraer.

Jacky's Landing	The lane to Jacky Geddes's croft.
King Street	<i>Area 3</i> One of several street names in the town in which is displayed loyalty to the crown or the esteem in which the royal family was held. Was also referred to as School Vennel and, in earlier times, as the High Vennel (the burgh school was in Fisher Street).
Lewis Street	Named after John Henry Lewis Taylor, a former landowner in this area. Originally called Staneykirk Lane.
Little Dublin Street	The name has since disappeared but, as the name suggests, this street lay within the area of Irish settlement.
Little Ireland	The name has since disappeared but, as the name suggests, this lay within the area of Irish settlement.
McCulloch Place	It was built in 1827 by John McCulloch, the owner of the weaving factory, for his workers. It was taken away, house by house, over the course of two decades from 1942 onwards. It is now the boundary of Safeway's supermarket.
Market Street	<i>Area 1</i> Came into being in the middle of the nineteenth century because of reclamation of the Breastwork. The site, originally a beach, had housed St John's (Horse) Fair.
Millhill Street	Led through Little Ireland and Mill Street to Rankin's Mill (the Pretty/Pratey Mill). Its alignment has shifted slightly.
Navy Raw	<i>Area 3</i> A close off George Street, also known as Sloss's Close. Like the Pretty Mill Close, it contained poor quality housing for day labourers and casual agricultural workers. Mr Sloss owned the property and also had a joiner's shop there.
Neptune Street	<i>Area 3</i> A row of houses which at one time occupied the lower part of Agnew Crescent. Name since disappeared.
North Strand Street	<i>see</i> South Strand Street
Portrodie	<i>Area 1</i> The area beside the West Pier.
Pretty Mill Close	Also known as Rankin's Close. A close that ran off Dalrymple Street, it has since disappeared. Like the Navy Raw (Sloss's Close), it had poor quality housing for day labourers and casual agricultural workers.
Princes Street	<i>Area 3</i> One of several street names in the town in which is displayed loyalty to the crown or the esteem in which the royal family was held.

Queen Street	<i>Area 3</i> Also referred to as the Middle Vennel. One of several street names in the town in which is displayed loyalty to the crown or the esteem in which the royal family was held.
Rankin's Close	Better known as the Pretty Mill Close, a close that ran off Dalrymple Street. Has since disappeared.
St Andrew Street	<i>Area 2</i> Named after the patron saint of Scotland.
St John's Street	<i>Area 2</i> Named after the patron saint of Stranraer.
Sloss's Close	Better known as the Navy Raw, a close that ran off Dalrymple Street.
North Strand Street South Strand Street	<i>Area 2</i> Here, a settlement developed along the banks of a small burn (the Town Burn).
Sun Street	<i>Area 3</i> Ran along the back of the burgage plots of the main street.
Swan's Isle	Appears on old title deeds and refers to an area in what is now Hanover Square car park. Before they were culverted, the Town and Laundry burns joined here and, with many offshoots (for the mill and for tanning pits), a part of this area became an island. The name has since disappeared from the centre of town. At one stage, there were so many bridges over the burns and offshoots that the inhabitants referred to the town as Little Venice.
Thistle Street	<i>Area 2</i> Formerly Chapel Street. Named after a national emblem.
Trade Street	Was the main thoroughfare in the old Tradeston district. The name has since disappeared; it is now Trades Court. Tradeston was one of several small settlements outwith the limits of the early town but later swallowed up as it expanded. Tradeston literally meant the trades (part) of the town, and was heavily populated by Irish immigrants. The trades were primarily cottage industries, notably glove-making, stocking-making and weaving.

alderman	Chief burghal officer, sometimes called <i>prepositus</i> , later provost.
almshouse	House for the support and lodging of the poor; sometimes a hospital.
backlands	The area to the rear of the burgage plot behind the dwelling house on the frontage. Originally intended for growing produce and keeping animals; site of wells and midden heaps. Eventually housed working premises of craftsmen and poorer members of burgh society.
baillie	Burgh officer who performed routine administration, often under an alderman or <i>prepositus</i> .
baxter	Baker.
booth	Small open-fronted stall, sometimes free-standing but often appended to the front of houses lining the street, where merchants and craftsmen sold their goods.
boundaries	<i>see</i> burgage plot
burgage plot	A division of land, often of regular size, having been measured out by liners, allocated to a burgess. Once built on, it contained the burgage house on the frontage (<i>see</i> frontage) and a backland (<i>see</i> backland). In time, with pressure for space, the plots were often subdivided—repletion. Plots were bounded by ditches, wattle fences or stone walls.
burgess	Person who enjoys the privileges and responsibilities of the freedom of the burgh.
close	<i>see</i> vennel
common good	Revenues from the burgh courts, the fishings, multures, market tolls, rentals, <i>etc.</i>
cordiner	Leather worker.
craft	Trade.
documentary sources	Written evidence, primary sources being the original documents.
entresol	A low storey between two main storeys of a building, generally between the ground floor and first floor.
façade	Finished face of a building.
feu-ferme	Payment of burghal dues to the burgh superior by a pre-agreed annual sum.
frontage	Front part of burgage plot nearest the street, on which the dwelling was usually built.
gap site	Burgage plot not built up or 'biggit'; in a modern context, undeveloped space between two buildings.

guild	Organisation or fraternity for mutual support, whether economic, religious or social.
hinterland	Rural area around a burgh, to which the burgh looked for economic and agricultural support; hinterland likewise dependent on burgh market.
indweller	Unprivileged, non-burgess dweller in a town.
infetment	(Old Scots law) investment with heritable property.
merk	13s 4d, two-thirds of £ Scots.
microburin	A distinctive form of waste flint formed in the process of making microliths.
microlith	A small worked flint flake or blade.
pend	Narrow close or walkway between buildings.
prehistory	Period of human history before the advent of writing.
repletion	<i>see</i> burgage plot
rig	<i>see</i> burgage plot
scarping	Removal of earth, often to provide level ground prior to building.
sherd	Fragment of pottery.
tectonic movements	Displacements in the earth's crust.
toft	<i>see</i> burgage plot
tolbooth	The most important secular building; meeting place of burgh council; collection post for market tolls; often housed town gaol.
toll	Payments for use of burgh market.
townhouse	Principal modern civic building.
tron	Public weigh-beam.
urban nucleus	Original site/s from which town developed.
vennel	Alley; narrow lane.
waukmill	A fulling mill
£	£ Scots.

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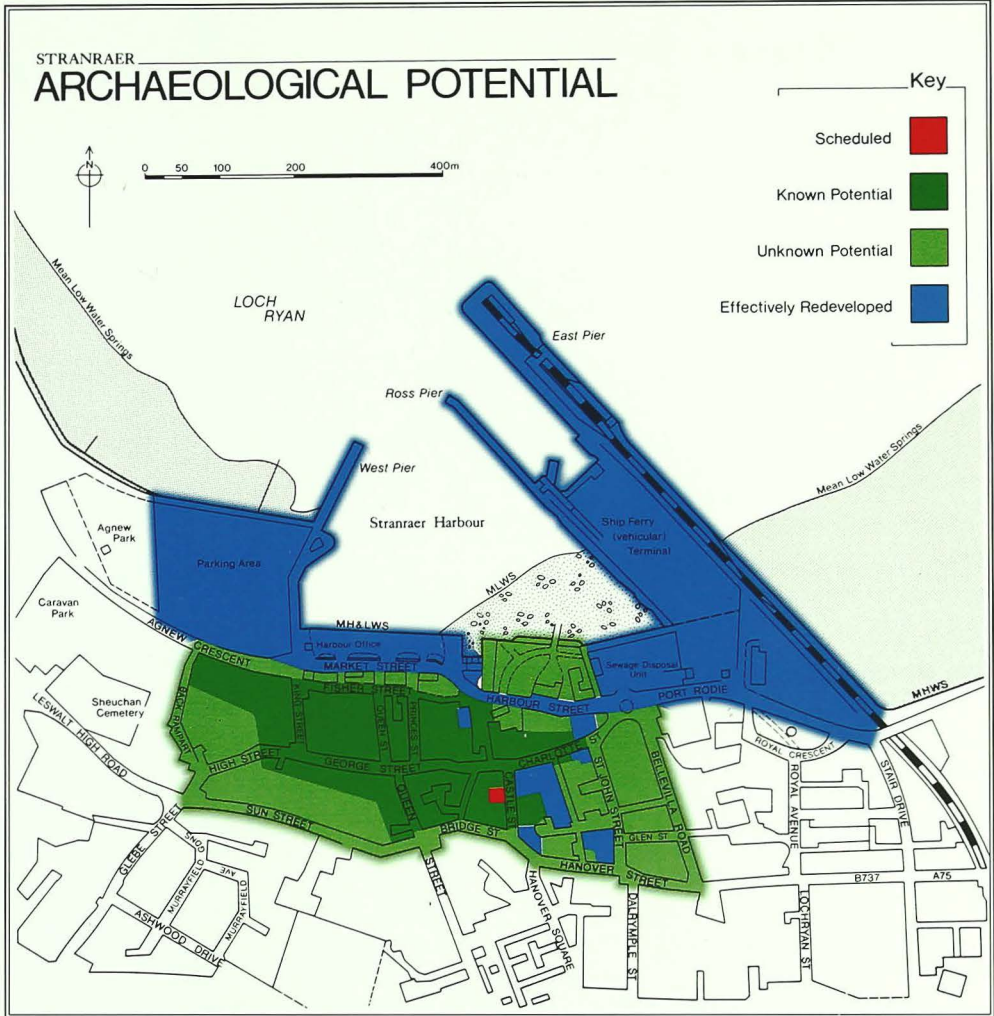


figure 22

The archaeological potential of Stranraer

Historic Stranraer

It is exactly four hundred years since Stranraer was created a burgh of barony in 1595, but a settlement has existed at 'Stranreuer' since at least the fourteenth century.

Historic Stranraer is a fascinating study of the town's history and archaeology, its historic buildings, its geography and topography, and the origins of its streets and street names.

This book is part of the **Scottish burgh survey**—a series designed to identify which areas of Scotland's historic burghs are of archaeological interest.



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