

The Origins of the Settlements at Kelso and Peebles, Scottish Borders

**Archaeological excavations in Kelso and Floors Castle and
Cuddyside/Bridgegate, Peebles by the Border Burghs Archaeology
Project and the Scottish Urban Archaeological Trust, 1983–1994**

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Abstract

This is a report on archaeological work in two of Scotland's less well-known medieval burghs - Kelso and Peebles. The excavations at Wester Kelso/Floors Castle established that the original medieval burgh of Kelso or Wester Kelso was much further west than previously believed, being situated well inside the present Castle policies. That early settlement at Wester Kelso appears to have been abandoned in the 14th or 15th centuries, at the same time that the royal burgh of Roxburgh was deserted, probably as a result of the English occupation of Roxburgh Castle. The other settlement of Easter Kelso, near the abbey, survived and expanded northwards from the abbey along Roxburgh Street. The finding of a possible building terrace in Phase 1 at 13–19 Roxburgh Street indicates that settlement along the southern end of that street could date to as early as the 13th or 14th centuries. Combining the archaeological, cartographic and documentary evidence, it seems clear that 'Easter' Kelso, now Kelso, had expanded from the market area around the abbey northwards towards the Floors estate by the early 18th century.

The excavations in Peebles have provided important information on the origins of the settlement of the peninsular ridge between the Tweed and Eddleston Water. The results obtained from the excavations at the two sites in Peebles indicate that settlement of the ridge began in the 12th century, soon after the establishment of the royal castle and burgh by David I (1124–53). At both sites, after initial dumping of rubbish, possibly to raise the ground level to counter flooding, occupation, in the form of stone structures, can be dated to

the 14th century at the latest, with probable earlier dumping of domestic refuse in the 12th and 13th centuries. The street of Bridgegate was apparently laid out in the 13th or 14th centuries when the excavated site was divided into three properties aligned on that street, two of which had stone buildings erected on them. Alternatively, Bridgegate may have been the initial focus of settlement on the east side of the Eddleston, providing the access route from the east into Old Town, where a pilgrimage centre had been established at the Cross Kirk in 1261, and the location of the tolbooth (Bridgegate Building 4) in it suggests that this street was originally more important than High Street. It is noteworthy that all eight medieval buildings excavated at the two Peebles sites were of stone construction. Peebles tolbooth the civic centre of the burgh – is the only medieval tolbooth site in Scotland to have been excavated.

The medieval pottery imports recovered at Wester Kelso show that the burgh's origins date to the 12th century, soon after the transfer of the Tironensian abbey from Selkirk to Kelso. The pottery finds also suggest that Wester Kelso was deserted in the 14th century or soon after. At Peebles Bridgegate, the presence of similar material, although residual, hints that occupation on the south and east side of the Eddleston Water could also have begun as early. The results of the excavations have shown that in both Kelso and Peebles much archaeological information can be retrieved on their medieval and post-medieval origins and growth, even in areas of the burghs previously thought to have little significance.

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Permission to excavate the sites was given by Borders Regional Council (13–19 Roxburgh Street), Mr and Mrs Robertson (Chalkheugh Terrace), His Grace the Duke of Roxburghe (Wester Kelso/Floors Castle) and Tweeddale District Council and Eildon Housing Association (Bridgegate).

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David Munro drew the phase plans for 13–19 Roxburgh Street, Chalkheugh Terrace, Wester Kelso/Floors Castle and Bridgegate, based on illustrations by Rupert Kavanagh. The artefact illustrations are by Frank Moran (Kelso and Bridgegate) and David Munro (Cuddyside). Pottery illustrations are by Eric Cadow (Kelso), David Munro (Bridgegate) and Frank Moran (Cuddyside). Adrian Cox would like to thank Mandy Clydesdale and Debbie Forkes for selective conservation of Bridgegate and Kelso artefacts. Derek Hall would like to thank George Haggarty for his help in reassessing the pottery assemblages from the Kelso excavations and for his invaluable comments on the Post Medieval and Industrial pottery groups.

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General introduction

The Borders Burghs Archaeology Project was set up in July 1983, under the direction of Piers Dixon, by the sponsors, the Borders Architects Group, with funding from the Manpower Services Commission. The Project's aim was to carry out archaeological excavations in Kelso and Jedburgh at sites which were due to be developed. It also conducted excavations in Eyemouth, Stow and Peebles, including a Bronze Age short cist at King's Meadow, Peebles (Fine 1985, 3), which has been restored for public display *in situ*. In addition, research excavations were carried out in the grounds of Floors Castle, on the site of the deserted settlement of Wester Kelso, and in the grounds of Springwood Park, on the site of the deserted settlement of Roxburgh Newtown or Bridgend. A watching brief was also carried out on a

site at 10 Abbey View, Kelso. Of these sites, this report deals with two sites in Kelso (13–19 Roxburgh Street and Chalkheugh Terrace), three sites in the grounds of Floors Castle, and the site of the medieval tolbooth in Bridgegate, Peebles. Separate reports have been published on the excavations in Jedburgh (Dixon *et al* 2000), at Bishop's Palace, Stow (Cox *et al* 2000) and at Springwood Park (Dixon 1998). In addition, the excavations at Cuddyside, Peebles in 1993 and 1994 by the Scottish Urban Archaeological Trust are reported on here. The preparation of the present report was funded by Historic Scotland. The Project Archive will be deposited in due course with the NMRS in Edinburgh; the location of the finds will be determined by Historic Scotland's Finds Disposal Panel.