

Industry and crafts

Medieval towns typically possessed a greater variety of crafts and industries than rural settlements, but in Scarborough archaeological evidence of industrial and craft processes has been slow to accumulate. One of the main problems in finding such evidence is that many medieval crafts were undertaken within private properties rather than in dedicated buildings and are consequently difficult to distinguish in the archaeological record from ordinary domestic activities. Another problem is that many crafts dealt with organic material such as wood and leather which is only preserved where there are waterlogged ground conditions. In Scarborough such conditions are restricted to a few areas. Waterlogged medieval deposits have been encountered along the line of the Damyot stream, towards the south end of the Old Borough defensive ditch and on sites in the harbour area.

Occupational surnames offer some clues to the range of crafts present in the town. For example, the 1298 rent roll of the tenants of John Uctred includes individuals with surnames such as cordwainer, fishwasher, mercer, tailor, barber, goldsmith, haremaker, girdler, cobbler, limeburner and cutler (Brown 1902, 91–3). There is obviously no certainty that the people listed actually followed the profession suggested by their surnames, but undoubtedly some did. That an individual with the surname Miller gave land bordering the Damyot stream in 1267 to the Franciscans to establish their friary could indicate there was a watermill inside the town in the middle years of the thirteenth century (Jeayes 1914, 34b). There is more secure evidence for trade and crafts towards the end of the Middle Ages when a memorandum from 1467 in the Corporation's *White Vellum Book* lists the town's trade companies as 'porters, shoemakers, barkars, barbars, chandlers, payntters, sclators, masons, wevers, walkars,

estrynglayers, glovers, bladsmaythes and shyrmacars, bacars, buccers, taylors, wryghts, smyths, marchants' (Jeayes 1914, 1c).

The use of documentary evidence is limited by the fact that not all crafts appear in the written records – precisely the case with the pottery industry which occupied a site on the north of the town in the thirteenth and first half of the fourteenth centuries. Neither the kilns nor the potters appear in any known documentary record, a probable indication of the low social status of the workers and the fact that they did not own the land on which the kilns stood.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

Pottery industry

Our understanding of the kiln site and its products is entirely due to archaeological work. Kilns were first discovered in 1854 during the construction of a malt kiln on the south side of Castle Road (site 8). A long series of brick arches, presumably the kilns, and quantities of green-glazed pottery came to light, with two of the arches supposedly recovered and taken to the museum. These had apparently disappeared by the beginning of the twentieth century (Rutter 1961, 51).

No further investigation of the kiln site is recorded until 1967 when Peter Farmer began the first of a series of excavations that continued until 1975 (sites 10, 11 and 12). In this period he found evidence of pottery manufacture extending southwards and eastwards from the site of the 1854 discovery, over a total area of 1ha. He found at least nine kilns of which one, or possibly two, had brick superstructures like those found in 1854. The others were much simpler kilns consisting of an oval structure cut into the natural clay with well-burnt clay and cobble walls (Farmer 1979, 14). In addition,

the excavators found quarry pits, a possible fuel store defined by a cobbled area with flanking postholes and a pit used for clay preparation.

Most medieval pottery manufacture took place away from towns and therefore the urban setting of the Scarborough ware industry is somewhat unusual. However, due to uncertainty over the alignment of the Old Borough defences in this part of the town, it is not certain if the excavated kiln site lay wholly within the Old Borough (as Farmer thought) or, as is argued in Chapter 2, the defences ran further to the east and therefore most of the kiln site lay within the New Borough (Figure 32). Ready access to the port may go some way to explaining why the kilns were sited within the town rather than in the countryside. The widespread coastal distribution of Scarborough ware indicates that it was distributed through the port while finds of the pottery in the town and its hinterland point to local distribution through the town's markets. The idea has been put forward that the small community of Cistercian monks who

settled in Scarborough in order to oversee the revenues of the parish church may have promoted the development of the industry as it has been claimed that they owned the kiln site (Farmer and Farmer 1982, 96). As a religious order the Cistercians were generally very active in promoting the economic development of their estates and it is therefore not beyond the realms of possibility that they had a hand in developing a pottery industry in the town. It has to be acknowledged however that there is no conclusive documentary or archaeological evidence associating them with the kiln site.

It appears that the northern part of the medieval town was sparsely populated in the Middle Ages and the kilns were probably sited here because of the reduced fire risk. The kilns occupied a south-facing slope where the prevailing winds would have blown the pollutants from the kilns northwards away from the more densely occupied parts of the town (Normandale 2001, 106). The Damyot stream less than 100m to the south of the kiln site would have provided the necessary supplies of water.

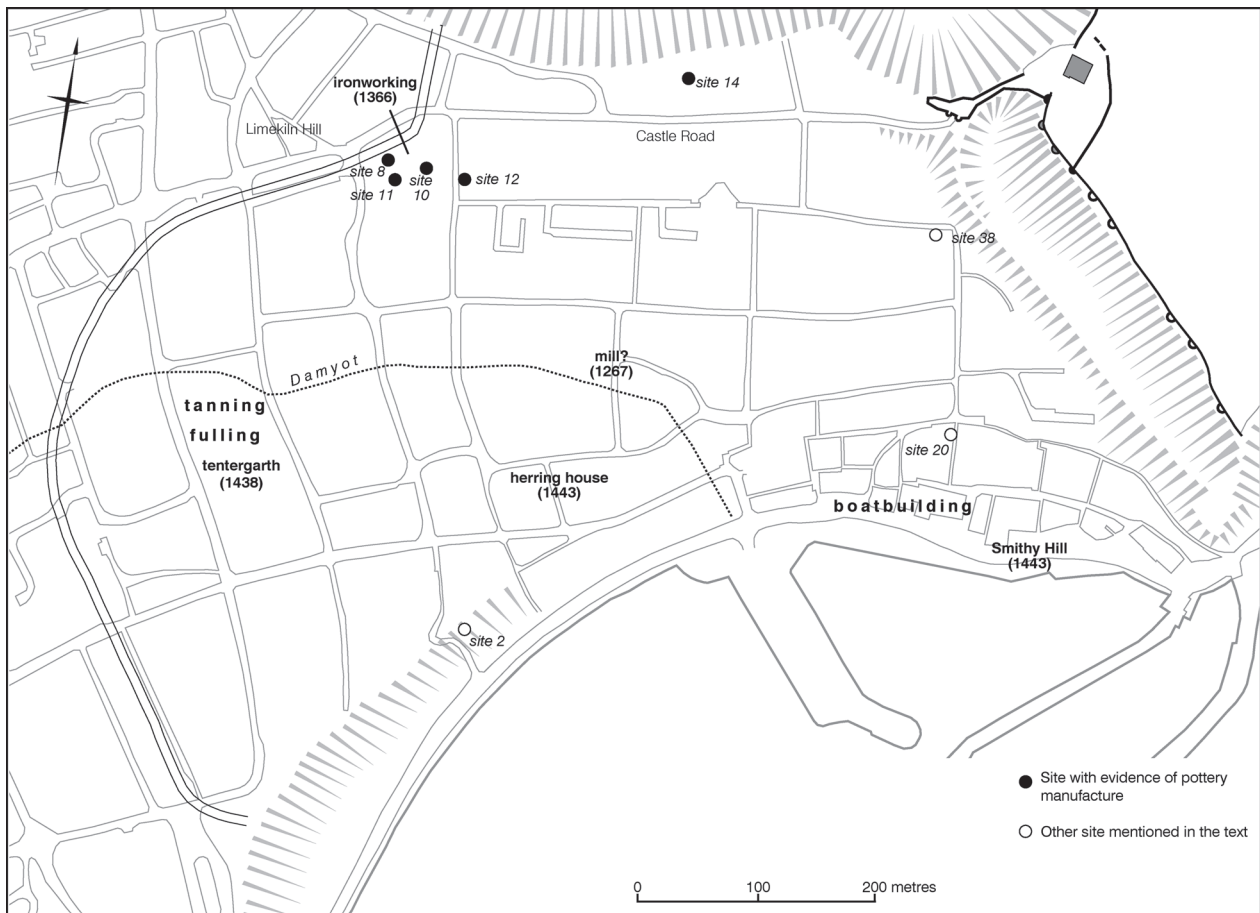


FIGURE 32: Location of documented crafts and industries in the medieval town.

Unstratified Scarborough ware wasters found during an excavation at No. 148 Castle Road suggest that manufacture may have spread over an area of up to 150m to the east of the excavated kiln site (site 14). However, no kilns were found and so it was not certainly established that pottery manufacture took place on this site. Perhaps less of a determining factor in the choice of site was the quality of the clay. Equally good deposits exist on other sites within the town, as is evident from the extensive clay quarrying for brick making which took place in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries on the north side of the town. A medieval clay quarry was discovered in an excavation on the edge of one of the eighteenth century brickfields on the north-east of the Old Borough (site 38). Although there is no proof that this particular quarry was connected with the pottery industry, it was close enough for clay to have been carted to the kilns, 400m to the west. This discovery warns us that areas quarried for clay in the medieval period may now be impossible to recognise because the same sites were exploited for the manufacture of bricks in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Since it is uncommon to find medieval pottery kilns inside a town, there is the possibility that some production did take place in the countryside around Scarborough. One site which seems a likely possibility is the town common, which began some 400m to the west of the known kiln site and presumably contained broadly the same clay deposits as inside the town. Even if there were no kilns here, it is possible that the potters had rights to dig clay from the common as they did at some other kiln sites (McCarthy and Brooks 1988, 15). Slightly further away, good quality firing clay exists in the Seamer valley where brick manufacturing took place in the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth centuries. It is possible that there were medieval clay pits or possibly even kilns here. Evidence of pottery manufacture has been found at the village of Newby, several miles to the north of the medieval town but it was probably active no earlier than the fifteenth century (Rutter 1961, 53). Much later on in the late eighteenth century there was a kiln site a mile from

Scarborough at the village of Falsgrave (Baker 1882, 27). These two sites demonstrate that pottery manufacture could have taken place in other locations outside the medieval town. Rather intriguingly, the place name 'kilneland' was noted in 1327 in the countryside within a few miles of Scarborough and this reference might indicate the presence of pottery kilns (Martin 1909, 156).

Bone-working

Two fragments of bone waste from the manufacture of beads were found by Peter Farmer at a site on Castle Road in excavations in 1979 (site 14). They have been dated to the twelfth century or later and may indicate bone-working took place for a time in this area (Pearson 2002, 13-14).

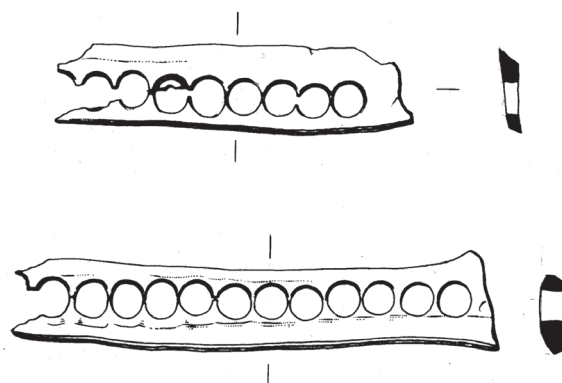


Figure 33: Bone waste from Castle Road (site 14) drawn at half size.

Limekilns

The remains of a limekiln were observed in 1972 at the rear of a shop at the corner of Marlborough Terrace and Castle Road (Farmer and Farmer 1982, 82). Marlborough Terrace is shown as Limekiln Hill on the 1852 Ordnance Survey map which suggests that the visible kiln may not have dated as far back as the medieval period (Ordnance Survey 1852). However, the name 'chalkhouse' was used in 1394 and connotes chalk or limestone which could indicate the presence of medieval limekilns in this part of Scarborough in the Middle Ages (Binns 2001a, 114).

Leather-working

Numerous leather offcuts were recovered from late medieval waterfront deposits on an excavation at

the bottom of Bland's Cliff in 1975 (site 2). This discovery was interpreted as evidence for a leather-working industry located to the north-east at the top of the cliff in Carr Street, now the eastern end of Newborough.

Iron-working

An excavation in 1987 at East Sandgate found several small hearths on a plot of ground, probably a yard to the rear of a medieval house (site 20). Associated pottery finds suggested a date in the fourteenth century while small quantities of iron slag found could indicate that the hearths were for small-scale iron working. It is possible there was a connection with the harbour where place-name evidence indicates iron-working took place (see below).

DOCUMENTARY AND PLACE-NAME EVIDENCE

An area in the middle of the New Borough may have been given over to cloth production in the late Middle Ages as a document from 1438 refers to a garden called Tentergarth in Blackfriargate (Queen Street). This probably indicates a tenterground, which was an area of open land where cloth could be stretched out to dry (Binns 2001a, 114). This area was close to the Damyt stream and it was therefore relatively easy to obtain the water necessary for processing the cloth. There was also sufficient room to develop the tenterground as documents indicate the area was not heavily built up in the late Middle Ages. There were tanneries in this same area in the seventeenth century and it is possible this industry had

medieval antecedents (Jeayes 1914, 122a). A 1374 reference to a close called 'le Tanere' on the sands suggests a second or alternative location (Jeayes 1914, 31d).

A 1465 document refers to a centre of iron-working at Smithy Hill on the foreshore, an area which was towards the front of the late medieval waterfront as it appears on the 1725 town plan (Binns 2001, 113; Cossins 1725). Smiths here were presumably closely connected with boat building and repair as well as the manufacture of iron fish hooks for the fishing fleet. Another part of the town where ironworking was carried out was on the north-west, on the site of the former pottery industry where a document of 1366 refers to the construction of a forge and a pair of bellows by Peter Hanson, himself the son of a wright (Jeayes 1914, 32b). By this date the pottery industry had probably gone out of production, but no archaeological evidence of iron-working is noted in any of the reports on the excavations at the site of the pottery industry. Returning to the harbour, shipbuilding is mentioned in the early thirteenth century, when the town provided war galleys for King John's fleet. There is also a reference in 1488 to the building and repair of vessels on an unidentified site called 'Botehill' (Childs 2001, 27; Jeayes 1914, 11b). With the fishing industry, however, it is likely that a lot of processing of catches took place away from the harbour. There is a reference in 1443 to a Herring House away from the foreshore in Fleshergate (now Globe Street) and an ordinance of 1485 forbade the drying of fish in the streets throughout the town (Jeayes 1914, 55a).