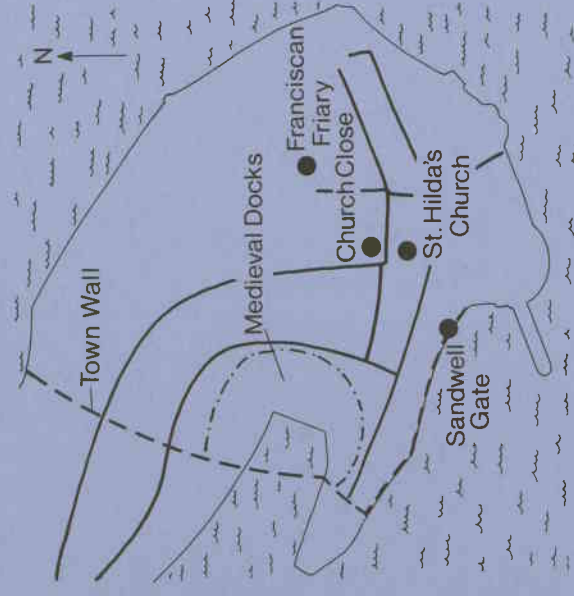


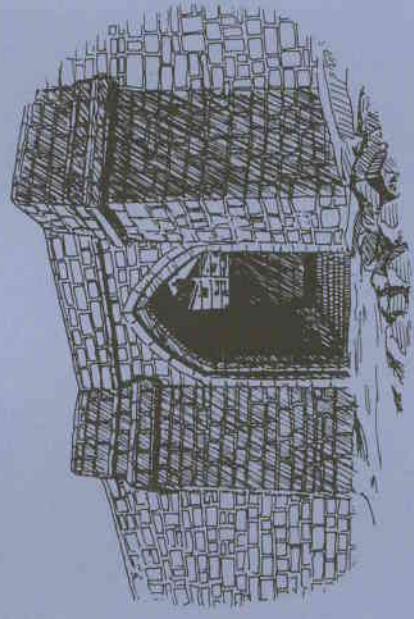
# HARTLEPOOL HEADLAND

## The Medieval Town of Hartlepool



### The Medieval layout of the Headland

The Headland boasts both a natural harbour and well drained soils, a combination which has encouraged occupation from prehistoric times. Cleveland County Archaeology Section has, over recent years, been able to excavate large areas of the Headland. The results of these projects have added greatly to our knowledge of medieval life, secular and religious, as well as economic and political. This leaflet is intended to give a brief introduction to the medieval town on the Headland and the major buildings that would have been familiar in the 13th and 14th centuries.



The Sandwell Gate

It is ironic that much of the development of Medieval Hartlepool in the 13th century was sponsored by the de Brus family and that it was to protect the Headland from the usurper Robert de Brus that the town defences were built. The first defences, a bank and ditch, were built after 1315 across the narrow neck of land that separates the Headland from the mainland. This was replaced in the first half of the 14th century by a massive stone wall. Excavations on three different sites along the line of the wall have recovered the bank and ditch of the initial defences. The wall also ran along the seaward side of Southgate, where today the Sandwell Gate and a stretch of wall still survive as reminders of Hartlepool's prosperous medieval past.

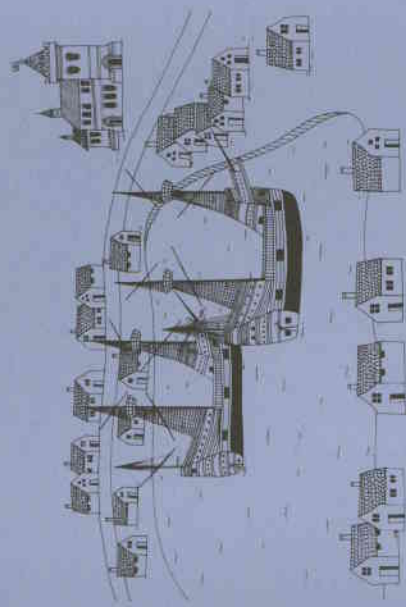
Finds from the excavations can be seen in the Gray Art Gallery and Museum

More information about the archaeology of the County is obtainable from:  
Cleveland County Archaeology Section,  
Old School, Victoria Road, Middlesbrough.

Published with the assistance of MSC through Cleveland County Community Programme Agency



The major modern thoroughfares preserve the layout of medieval Hartlepool. The core of the town ran down the slope from St. Hilda's church. Initially, this appears to have consisted of two rows, on the north side of Middlegate and the south of High Street/Southgate, with a large green or market area between. As the town developed the central area was infilled, Southgate was re-claimed and settlement spread along Northgate and Durham Street.



The docks at Southgate, from a 16th century map

Modern Southgate stands on re-claimed land that was once part of the harbour installations. It was during the medieval period that the harbour was at its most prosperous. In 1982 the docks were excavated; these had been built out of local limestone and were fronted with massive timbers, some of which survived in the waterlogged deposits. Tree rings show these were felled about 1216. Like much of the Headland at this time the expansion of the docks would have been largely financed by de Brus money. Documentary evidence records some of the cargo that passed through the port – cloth, wine, wool, oil and figs are some of the imports, while exports included corn and fish. The harbour also played an important strategic role during the Scottish Wars, acting as a base for the King's Navy as well as a supply port.



### Edward II silver penny found at Church Close, dated 1310-14

These town houses were long and thin and built of dressed limestone blocks. They might have been built and owned by wealthy members of the community, perhaps by the merchants whose ships used the harbour facilities of the Headland. Narrow lanes between the houses gave access to the different rooms and the rear of the properties. Initially built as domestic dwellings, these were later turned to industrial use and contained ovens for food processing. They stood to a height of two stories, the ground floor rooms being let to tenants, and the first floor used as living and storage area.

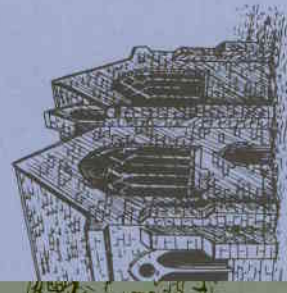


Reconstruction of the Friary church

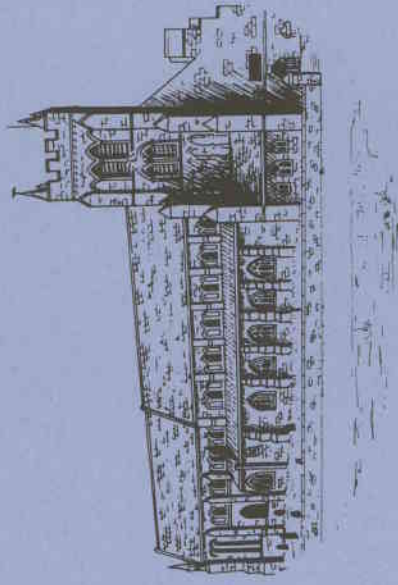


### Franciscan Friary, c.1240

St. Hilda's stands on the site of the friary. This was founded in the 13th century by donations from the de Brus family, a large and imposing family who would have been active in the Headland, the de Brus family being more concerned with the Headland than the community. Part of the friary was excavated by Cleveland Council in 1982-83, when the friary was found to be an adjoining cemetery were the houses would have been an extension of the size of the present friary, built as domestic dwellings, green painted and containing stained glass windows. In 139 the friary was replaced by a church which can still be seen. After the friary was demolished, the hospitalis hoped that the friary would be replaced by a church.

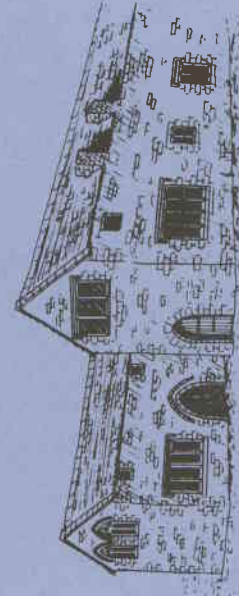


The church of St. Hilda dominates the Headland. The present building was built at the end of the 12th century by the de Brus family, who used the church as a family burial place. It is likely that the south doorway belonged to an earlier and smaller church, built by Robert de Brus II in the early 12th century. Despite 19th century alteration there is much to see of early 13th century craftsmanship. On the outside note particularly the clerestory and massive flying buttresses supporting the tower, which was built on sand and had suffered subsidence. The interior is best seen from the chancel arch, with spectacular nave arcading and decorative columns rising from the arcade to the clerestory. An altar tomb behind the altar screen commemorates the de Brus family.



### St. Hilda's church

With the outbreak of the Scottish Wars at the end of the 13th century and their continuance throughout the 14th century, Hartlepool increased rapidly in prosperity, becoming a major staging post and supply port for the English fleet, and the armies and garrisons in Scotland. Large medieval town houses fronting Durham Street were excavated in the summer of 1984 prior to re-development; these were built during this period of prosperity. These houses commanded a good view of the friary and St. Hilda's church and would have looked down onto the harbour basin.



Reconstruction of the medieval buildings on Church Close