

*Old College Quadrangle, University of  
Edinburgh*

South Bridge, City of Edinburgh

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*Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment: March 2010*

for

The University of Edinburgh

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Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment : March 2010  
(project AA.1495)

by Ross Cameron, Cath Richards, Tanja Romankiewicz and Tom Addyman

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## Old College Quadrangle, University of Edinburgh

### South Bridge, City of Edinburgh

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## Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment

### 1. *Non-Technical Summary*

Addyman Archaeology was commissioned by The University of Edinburgh to produce an Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment in response to the planning application to develop the grounds of Old College Quadrangle in Edinburgh.

The location is one of great historical significance and archaeological potential and analysis was conducted of cartographic, pictorial and documentary materials. These confirmed the existence of the Church of St. Mary in the Fields dating to the 13th century as well as an associated hospital. A mansion house known as Hamilton House occupied the site from the 16<sup>th</sup> century, until The University of Edinburgh acquired the land and developed their campus and facilities. Construction of the current Quadrangle was undertaken in stages from 1789-1827 and the ground level was lowered significantly in 1832.

This report contains several maps/Figures 1, 5 and 13, reproduced by permission of the Trustees of the National Library of Scotland (NLS). To view these maps online, see [www.nls.uk](http://www.nls.uk).

### 2. *Introduction*

#### i. *General*

Addyman Archaeology was contracted by The University of Edinburgh to produce an archaeological Desk-Based Assessment in response to an archaeological planning condition placed upon the planning application no. 08/01228/FUL. This work comprises the renewal of ground surfaces of the Old College Quadrangle, applied for by The University of Edinburgh.

The planning condition, placed by City of Edinburgh Council Archaeology Service (CECAS, contact John Lawson), states:

*No development shall take place until the applicant has secured the implementation of a programme of archaeological work, in accordance with a written scheme of investigation which has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Head of Planning & Strategy, having first been agreed by the City Archaeologist.*

This condition ensures the safeguarding of the interests of archaeological heritage.

The programme of archaeological works is expected to fall into two phases of works:

*Phase 1: Desk-Based assessment and evaluation (test pits)*

*Phase 2: Mitigation of the development impact upon significant archaeological remains (monitoring)*

This present Desk-Based Assessment relates to the phase 1 of archaeological programme and follows from the completion of the Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI).

The site has a historically rich and complex history charted from at least the 13<sup>th</sup> century in relation to the Church of St Mary in the Field. Although the history of the site is well documented<sup>1</sup>, the desk-based assessment systematically reviews the cartographic sources in order to locate the position of possible surviving remains of earlier buildings. The Desk-Based Assessment summarises the historic development, places the predecessor buildings within this historical summary to assess their archaeological and historical significance.

In addition to the historical and cartographic sources, an assessment of potential archaeological remains beyond the historical records is undertaken in order to understand possible survival of archaeologically significant features. This will involve assessing modern records and notes of earlier archaeological works, primarily through the PastMap records, the CANMORE database held by the *Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS)* and other readily accessible sources.

The research for the Desk-Based assessment informed the position of the evaluation trenches for the required evaluation phase. The results from the Desk-Based Assessment and the Archaeological Evaluation forming phase 1 of the project, will inform recommendations for the works undertaken in phase 2, thus minimizing the development impact upon any surviving archaeological remains.

## ii. *The Site*

The development area comprises the internal courtyard of the Old College building, currently used by The University of Edinburgh as offices and lecture theatres. The site is situated at NT 25990 73360, bounded to the north by Chambers Street, to the east by South Bridge, to the south by South College Street and to the west by the small lane of West College Street that separates the College building from the Royal Museum building (Figure 1).

The present building, built in 1789 by Robert Adam and completed by William Playfair in 1819-27 is situated in the heart of historic Edinburgh. The site is historically bounded by the Flodden Wall on the S and sits on the site of an earlier college building, The Old College.<sup>2</sup> This building superseded the Collegiate Church of St Mary in the Fields.

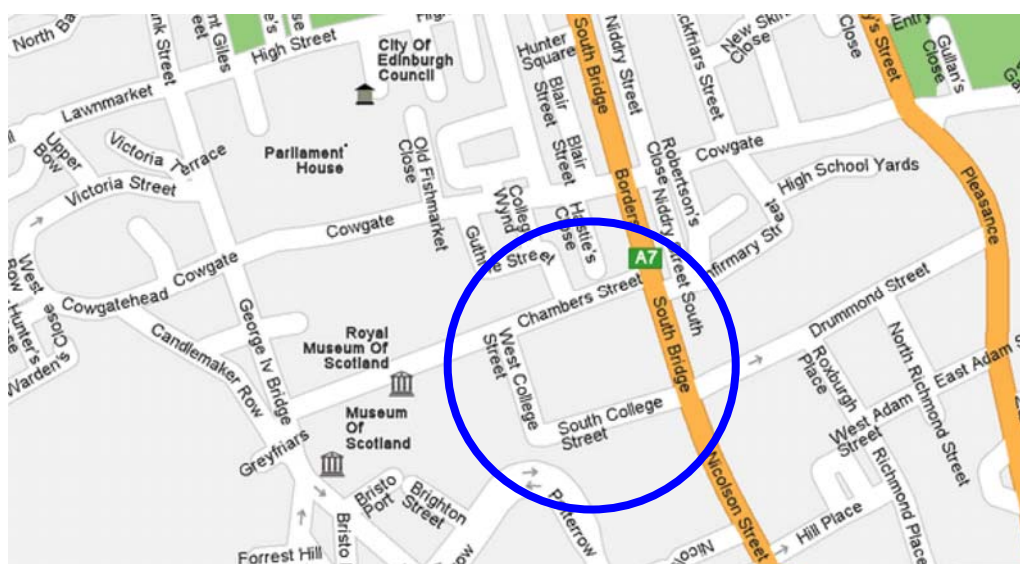


Figure 1: Location of site. Multimap.com.

<sup>1</sup> Fraser 1989.

<sup>2</sup> The name 'Old College' is now commonly, but confusingly applied to the present building. Gifford et al 1991, 188.

*iii. Geology and topography*

The site is located in the urban surroundings of the City of Edinburgh. Measuring around 64m W-E by 34m N-S, the area for development is an enclosed internal courtyard clearly defined by the buildings of The University of Edinburgh. The ground surface consists of firmly compact gravel. The central area is defined by a circumference of metal bollards and a stone channel runs around the centre for drainage. The surrounding surface angles towards this centre giving the impression of a slightly undulating interior. A faint drop can also be detected from W to E of the Quadrangle, further facilitating drainage and following the change of the natural ground level between West College Street and South Bridge.

The underlying geology in this area of Edinburgh consists of drift deposited till of the Devensian – Diamicton age overlying Lothians and Fife plagioclase-olivine-clinopyroxene-macrophric bedrock dating from the Dinitian to Westphalian periods.



*Plate 1: General view of Old College Quadrangle – from SW. Addyman Archaeology.*

**3. *The development of the site***

*iv. General*

Edinburgh University Old College Quadrangle lies in the heart of historic Edinburgh and has a long and well documented history of occupation.

*v. Prehistoric to Early Historic activity*

There is no evidence of prehistoric or early historic activity in and around the site of Old College Quadrangle; yet this may be a result of the extensive occupation that has continued in and around this site since at least the 13<sup>th</sup> century.



It is known from both archaeological and documentary sources that the site of Edinburgh castle was occupied in the prehistoric and early historic periods, when it formed a centre of power for the area.<sup>3</sup> The only excavations undertaken in the direct vicinity of the Old College site found little evidence beyond the post-medieval period and the excavations undertaken on Chambers Street during the construction and renovation work on the National Museum of Scotland found no evidence of occupation pre-dating the medieval period. Work by Addyman Archaeology at Forrest Road also found no evidence earlier than the 14<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>4</sup>

#### vi. *Medieval activity*

The Old College stands on the north side of the line of the Flodden Wall, inside the early 16<sup>th</sup> century fortified city. The first record of the church of St Mary-in-the-Fields, or Kirk of Field, dates from c1275. It was founded by Alexander II, and belonged to Holyrood Abbey. The word 'Fields' referred to its lying outwith the town wall of 1450. To the east of the church were buildings occupied by a provost, prebendaries and other priests. To the north of the church was its hospital. The building of the collegiate church appears as a low cruciform structure in a sketch of 1567 (Figure 2). It is of 13<sup>th</sup> century date, with the E end apparently replaced in the 15<sup>th</sup> century by a new choir.<sup>5</sup>

Both church and associated buildings were damaged during the 'Rough Wooing' of 1544 by Henry VIII, and the hospital was demolished and replaced by a mansion for the Duke of Chatelherault in 1552, referred to as Hamilton House. This house was associated with formally laid-out gardens. The church and other buildings were further severely damaged during the Reformation in 1559, and were left in a ruinous state.

The area became infamous as the site of the murder of Lord Darnley in February 1567, and a sketch of the murder scene provides a contemporary view of the buildings (Figure 2). This sketch was used to make a reconstruction of the site, seen from the north (Figure 3).

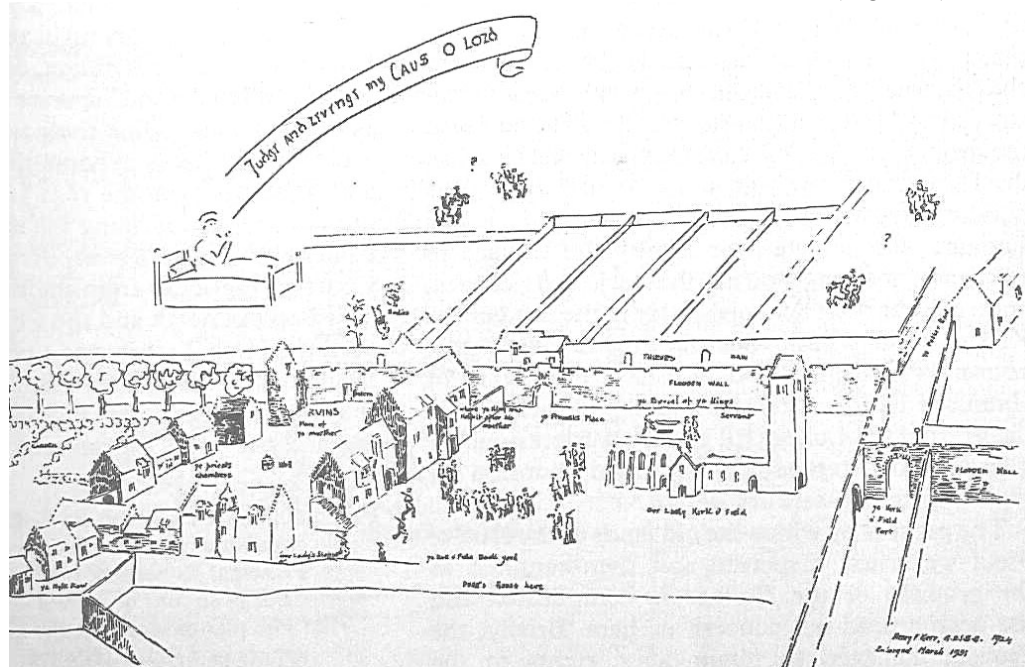


Figure 2: Reconstruction sketch of Kirk O' Fields and surroundings in 1567, seen from N., Henry F Kerr. Fraser 1989.

<sup>3</sup> Driscoll et al 1997.

<sup>4</sup> Macfadyen & Addyman 2007.

<sup>5</sup> RCAHMS 1951, 125.

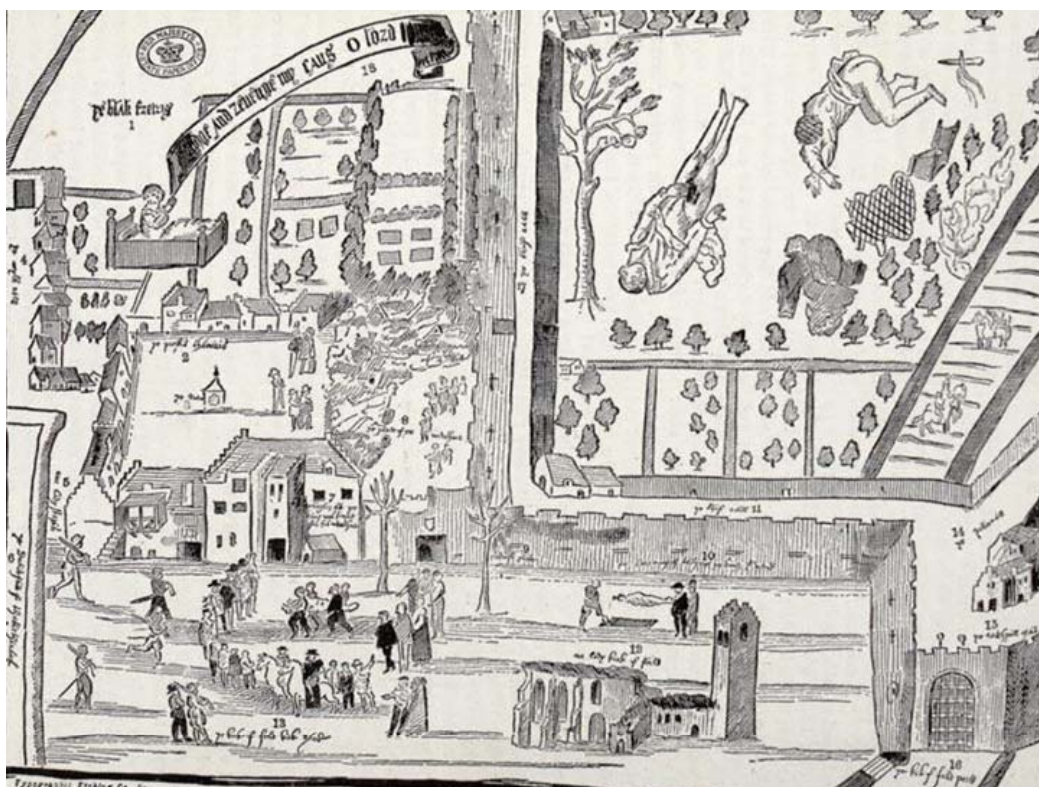


Figure 3: Engraving based on sketch of 1567, showing Kirk O' Fields and town wall.  
Fraser 1989.

The University of Edinburgh was granted its Royal Charter in 1582 by James VI and was founded as the “*Tounis Colledge*” by the Town Council of Edinburgh in 1583. The Kirk O’ Fields site was granted to the new college for building, and the old Provost’s House, shown in the centre of Figures 2 and 3, was adapted as the house for the Principal of the University. If the church building and hospital were initially re-used as part of the university scheme or when exactly they were demolished is not clear. The First Edition OS Map from 1852 (Figure 13, below) marks the position of the church in the SW corner of the site, probably completely overlain by the present corner building.

*“The [present] Library and the adjoining area of the quadrangle cover the position of the church to the E. of which, backing on what is now the W. side of South Bridge, lay the yards and lodgings associated with it; and at the junction of that street with South College Street stood the “Old Provost’s House,” where Darnley was murdered in 1567.”<sup>6</sup>*

Gordon of Rothiemay’s view of Edinburgh in 1647 (Figure 4) shows how the college had expanded by this date, its form to some extent determined by the line of the town wall.

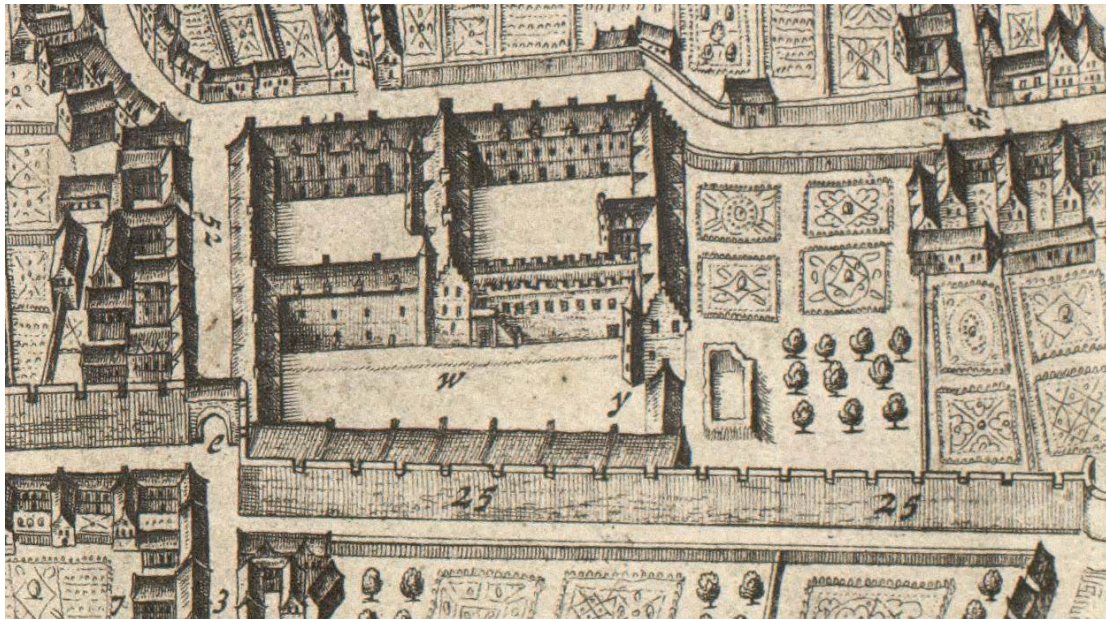
As part of the expansion of the university Hamilton House became the University library, but was later demolished, in 1798. A map regression, based on Fraser’s research<sup>7</sup> suggests that the footprint of this building sits underneath the present northern range, in its northwest half (compare Figures 6 and 7; Appendix A).

<sup>6</sup> RCAHMS 1951, 125.

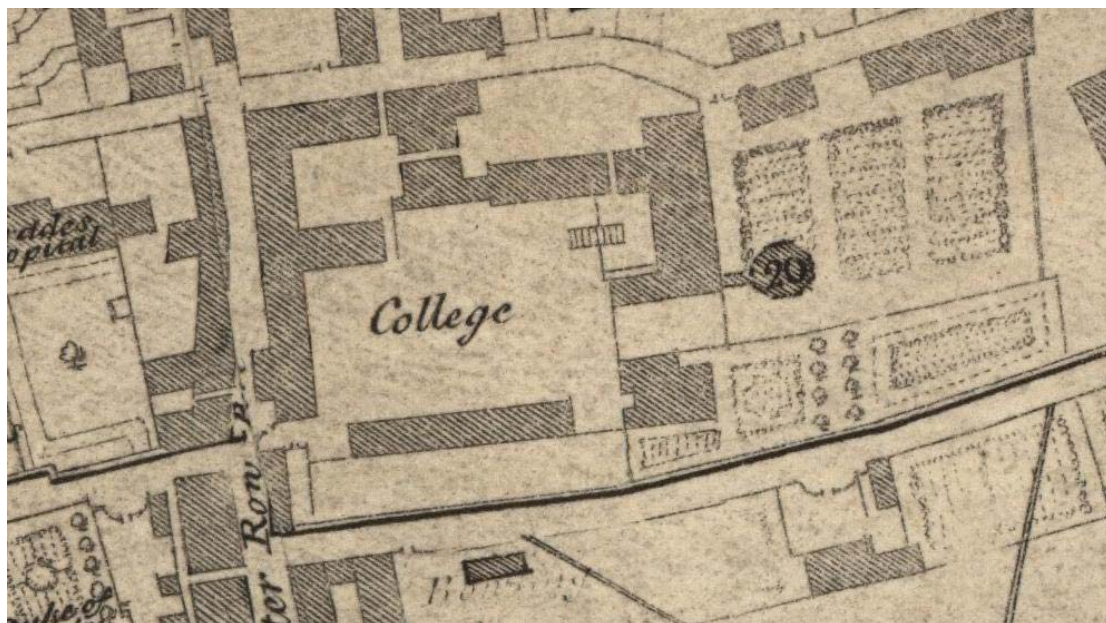
<sup>7</sup> Fraser 1989.



The structural remains of either of the church or the hospital building, as well as the later Hamilton House seem to be overlain by the existing buildings. It is thus expected that no remains of these formerly extant buildings are encountered during the proposed development works within the courtyard area. However, it is assumed that there was an open space between the church and the hospital, which may have been used as a garden or cloister. It is also possible that this was the burial ground for both the collegiate church and the hospital. As Hamilton House has been associated with formally laid-out gardens, part of these might have been situated in the area of the college courtyard under development.



*Figure 4: Detail of view of Edinburgh by James Gordon of Rothiemay, 1647. NLS.*



*Figure 5: Detail of map by Edgar, 1756. NLS.*

The College was surveyed in 1767, when the first proposals for rebuilding on the existing site were brought forward.

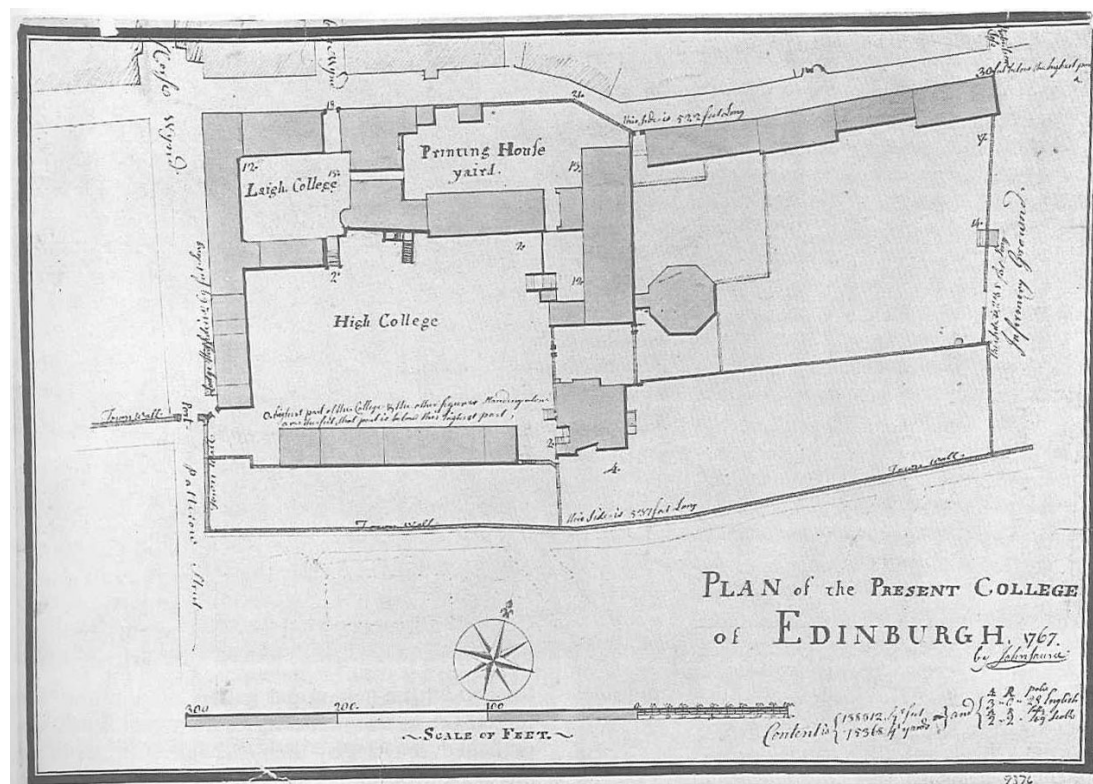


Figure 6: Laurie's Plan of the College 1767. Edinburgh University Library.

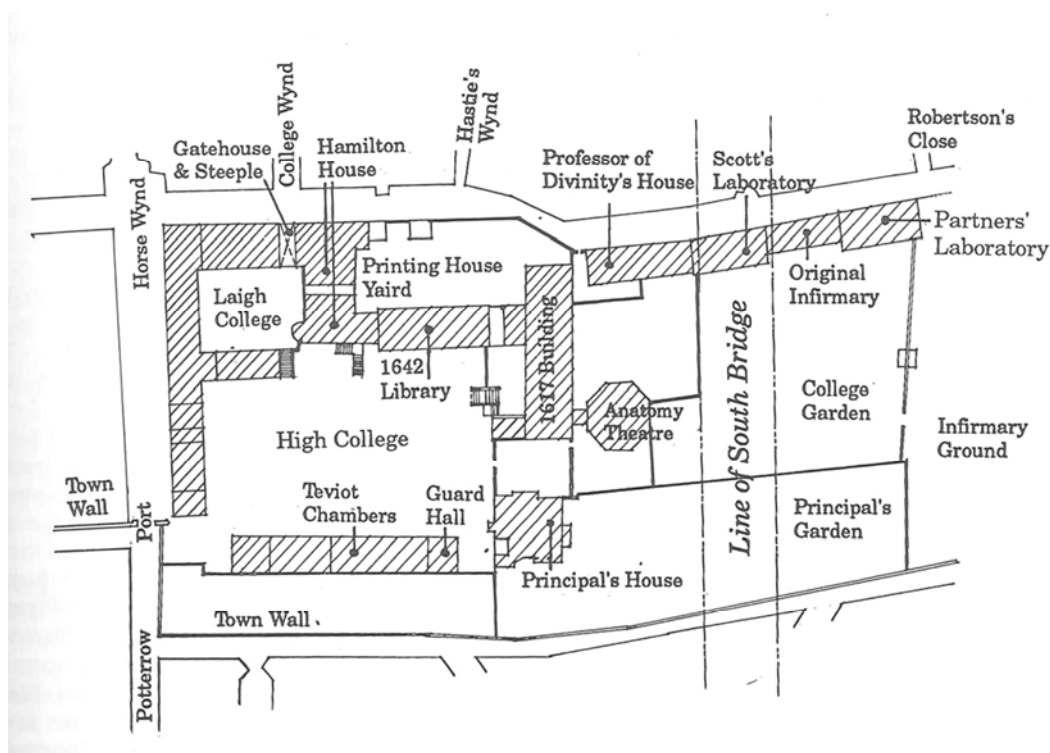
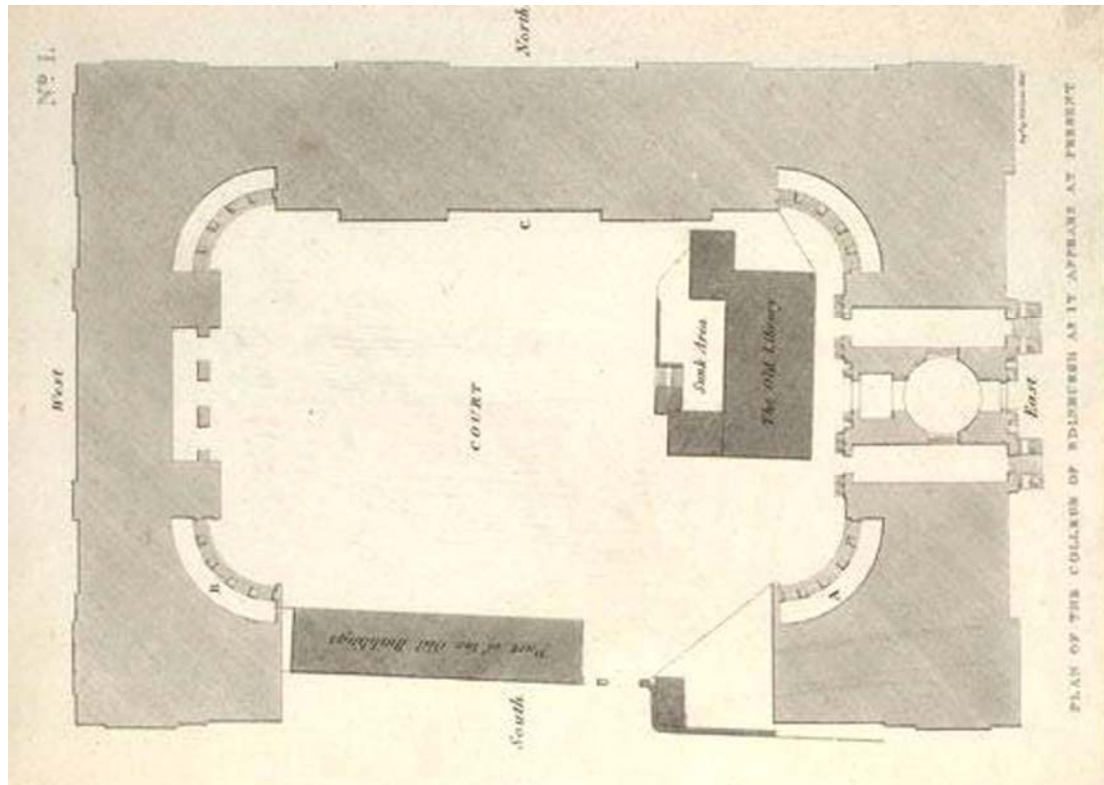


Figure 7: Laurie's Plan with key. Fraser 1989.



vii. *Post-medieval activity*

The passing of the South Bridge Act in 1785 was to lead to a fundamental alteration in the layout of the Old Town. The line of the new street leading to South Bridge passed through the grounds of the College, and the Council took the opportunity to establish a scheme to rehouse the College in more suitable, and impressive buildings. Trustees were appointed in 1789 and the architect Robert Adam eventually chosen. Funding was a problem from the start, as were the difficulties of building a new college on the site of the existing buildings, with the need to retain sufficient teaching space at all times.



*Figure 8: Plan of the College in 1823, showing new buildings in paler shading, with the existing Teviot Chambers and Old Library in darker shading; Lizars.*  
Edinburgh University Library.

Apart from Gordon of Rothiemay's bird's eye view of 1647, the earliest detailed images of the University buildings are associated with fund-raising efforts in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. These show how the old buildings were replaced gradually, and the contrast between their condition and the neatness of the new-built is striking (Figures 8-11).



Figure 9: Sketch of the old Library, with the new buildings behind. Lizars, 1823. Edinburgh University Library.

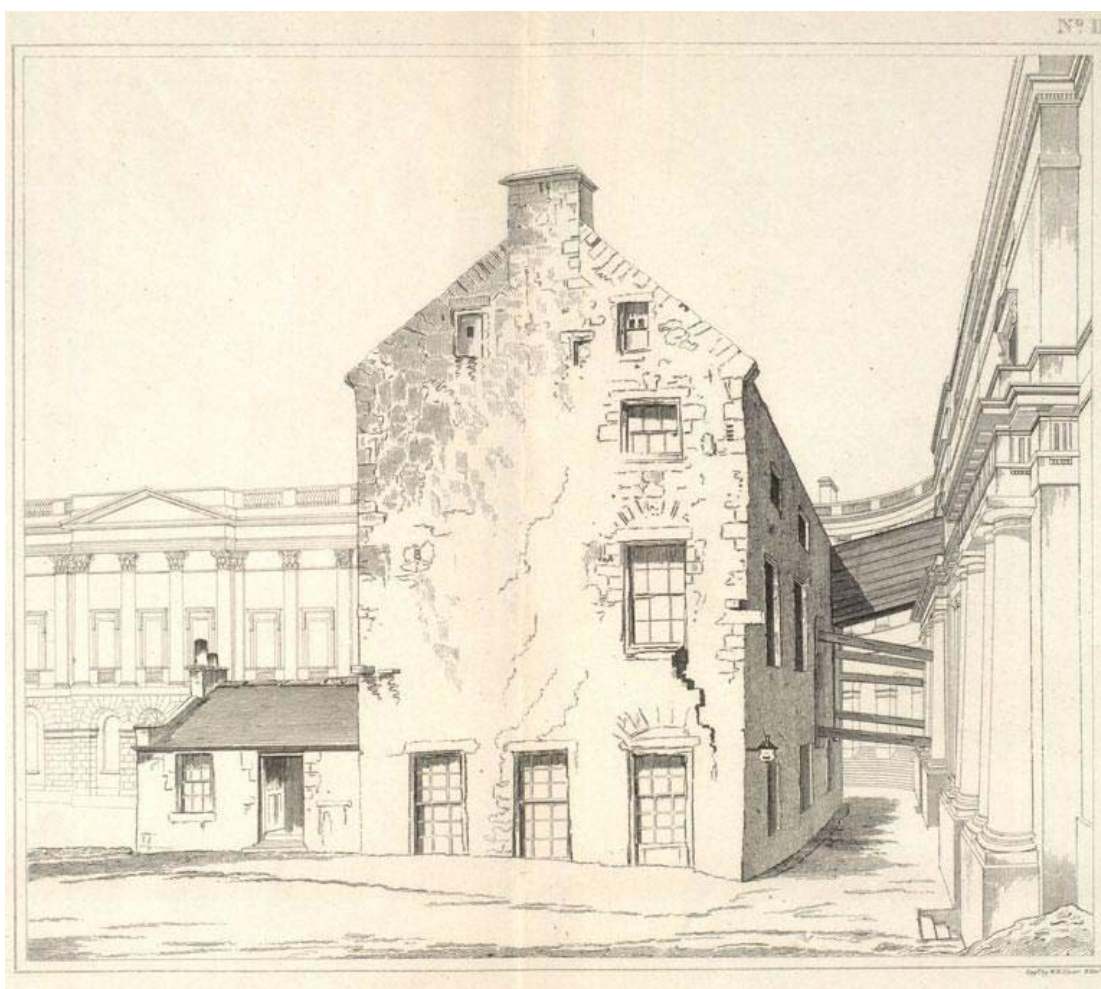
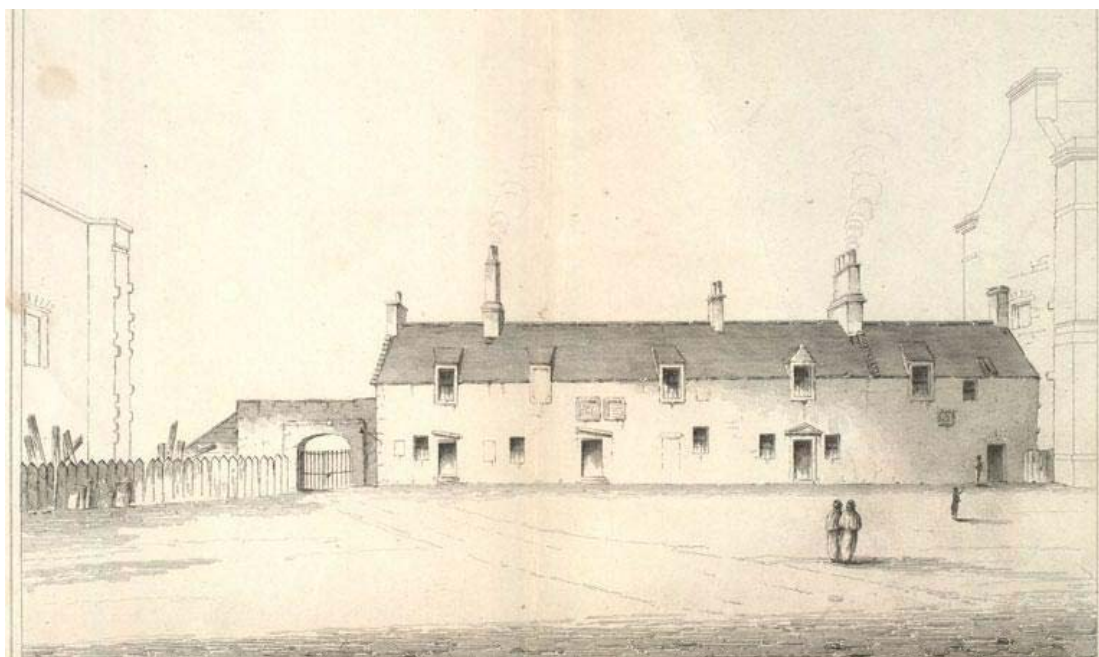


Figure 10: View of the old Library in 1823; Lizars. Edinburgh University Library.



*Figure 11: View of Teviot Chambers, 1823. Lizars. Edinburgh University Library.*

To illustrate the changes between the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century and the new development before the Playfair scheme Fraser published two sketch plans of the old college. One showing the site in 1767 and one showing the extent of the old college in 1818, before the Playfair scheme (Figures 8 and 13).<sup>8</sup> An overlay of these sketches onto the current plan of existing buildings shows that most of the original buildings of the old university were replaced by Adam's and Playfair's buildings in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is only in the NE part and in the NW corner of the courtyard that possible foundations of the earlier university buildings might survive (compare trench plan Appendix A). These seem to comprise the old library building from 1642 and perpendicular to it, along the eastern edge of the courtyard the main building dating to 1617, once containing the Common Hall.<sup>9</sup> These buildings are recorded in historic drawings, dating to the 1820s, the time of construction of Playfair's works, together with associated smaller buildings, stairs and revetment walls.

<sup>8</sup> Fraser 1989, 33, 45.

<sup>9</sup> Fraser 1989, 34.



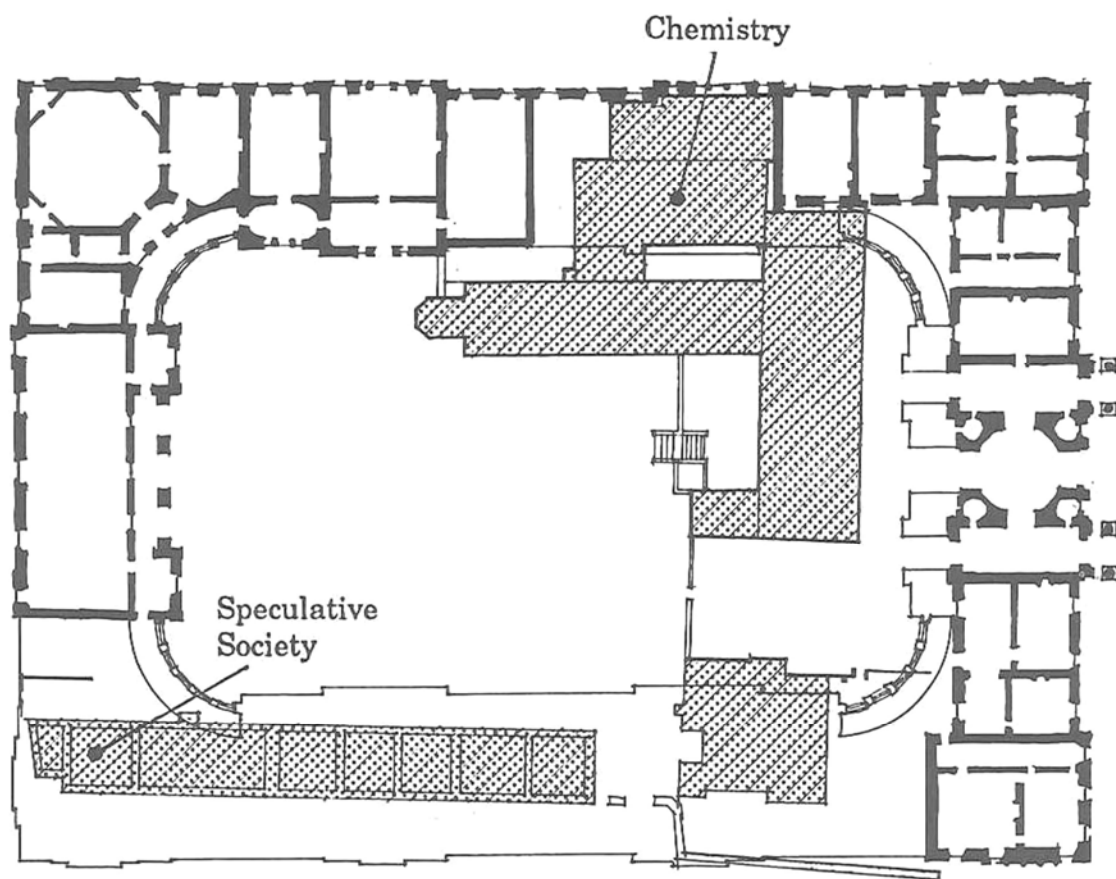


Figure 12: Diagram of Playfair's plan of existing and projected buildings in 1818. Fraser 1989, 45.

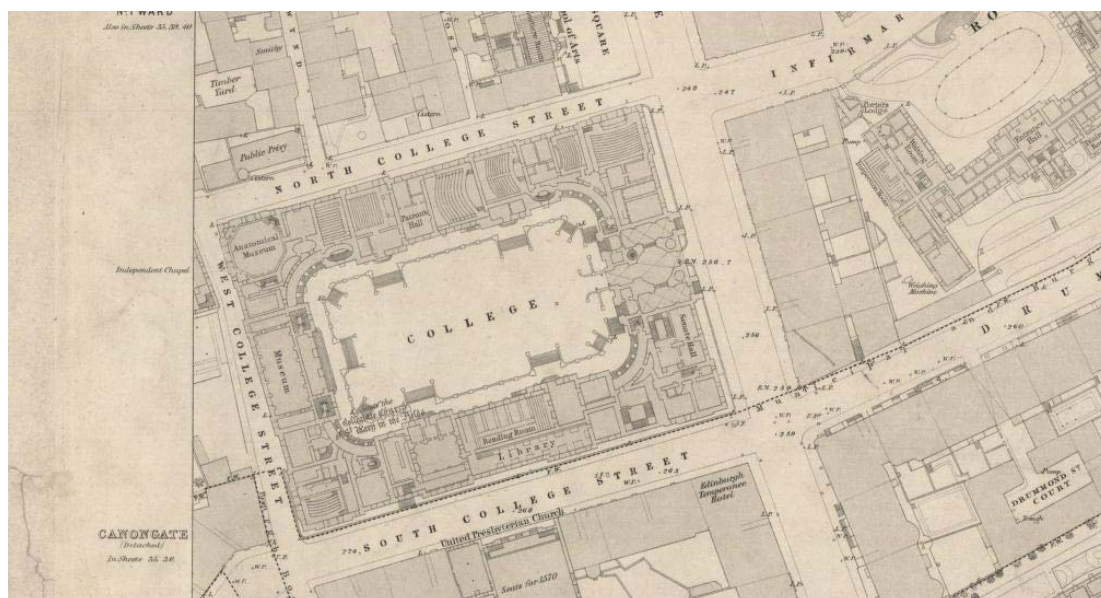


Figure 13: First Edition Ordnance Survey Map, surveyed 1852. NLS.

viii. 19<sup>th</sup> century to present

The Playfair scheme involved the construction of a drain running along the circumference of the internal courtyard. This drainage scheme is to be re-used for the current development.

Another possible drain or service channel is marked on a drawing from 1895 (Figure 15). This drawing suggests the construction of openings or manholes to a vitiated air flue or pipe channel, which are positioned in front of the centre of the northern and southern building range. Annotations of the 1895 plan have sketched a connection between those two entry points. The flue or pipe is accessible through these manholes.

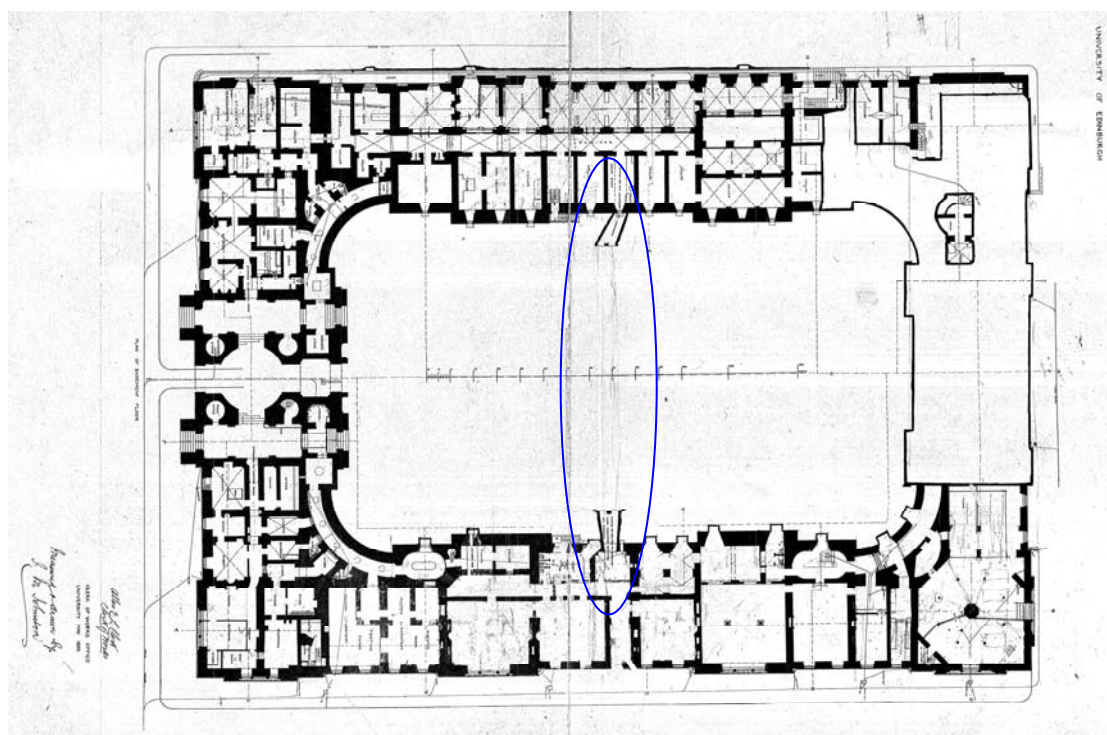


Figure 14: Basement plan of 1895 showing the sketched on vitiated air pipe.  
The University of Edinburgh.

Despite the good historical documentation of the previous buildings on site, it is unclear how much of the previous buildings remains after the construction of Playfair's courtyard scheme. His initial proposal involved the reduction of the existing courtyard level by nine and a half feet to create a gentle accent from the street level of South Bridge.<sup>10</sup> This required the insertion of stairs along the perimeter of the courtyard. Although this scheme was later altered, apparently reduced from initially 11 steps to 9,<sup>11</sup> it would still have resulted in a substantial reduction of the level of the interior.

Any shallow remains of archaeological features or foundations would have been lost in this process, apparently carried out in 1832. It seems unlikely that the foundations of the pre-18<sup>th</sup> century buildings on the site would have extended to a depths below the lowered level. The sketches of 1823 (Figures 9-12) show the difference between the ground floor level of the old university buildings and the ground floor level of the Playfair buildings.

<sup>10</sup> Fraser 1989, 176.

<sup>11</sup> Fraser 1989, 182.



Figure 15: View of Old College Quadrangle in 1960. St Andrew's University.

#### 4. *Potential and recommendations*

The proposed development lies within an area of significant historical and archaeological interest. The extensive ground works undertaken in 1832 may have reduced the ground level to such an extent that little of significant archaeological interest remains, but it will not be possible to ascertain this without physical archaeological investigation. The development will require a minimum removal of the top 0.50m of deposits. This may impact upon any potential archaeological remains preserved *in situ* beneath this level.

As a result of the significant medieval cultural heritage of the area in which the proposed development lies, it is recommended that, prior to any development of the site as outlined above, an archaeological evaluation should be carried in order to assess the potential for the survival of historically significant material. For the small area covered by the courtyard it would be useful to assess ca. 5% of the total development area to evaluate the potential for surviving archaeological remains. The assessment of the archaeological potential and the impact of the proposed development suggest targeting specific areas which have a higher potential to contain archaeological features. Although a trench plan will have to be agreed formally with the Archaeology Services (CECAS), it is proposed here to concentrate the trenches on areas that align with the locations of structures pinpointed through map-regression.

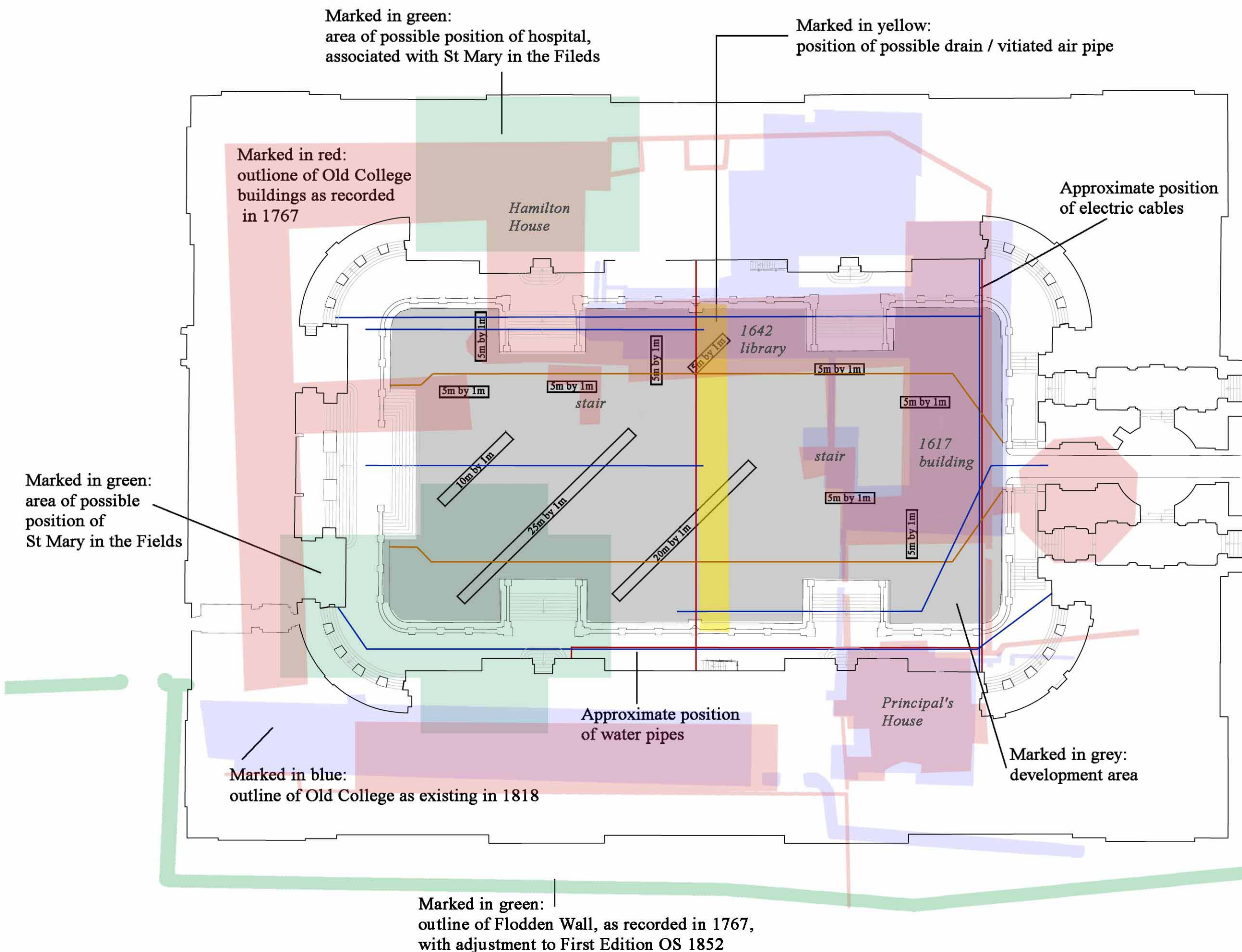
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## ***Abbreviations***

- NLS - National Library of Scotland  
RCAHMS - Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historic Monuments of Scotland





0 1 2 3 4 5  
Scale in Metres

**NOTE: Trenches are approximate positions only; the positions of historic buildings and structures are estimates from historic sources**