

**SOUTH GARDEN AREA
CHAPLAIN'S COURT
20 THE CHANONRY
OLD ABERDEEN**



Test pits and recording

Carried out 16th and 21st July 2015

by

Murray Archaeological Services Ltd



Report No: MAS 2015-22

by

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- Test pits and recording-

1. Background

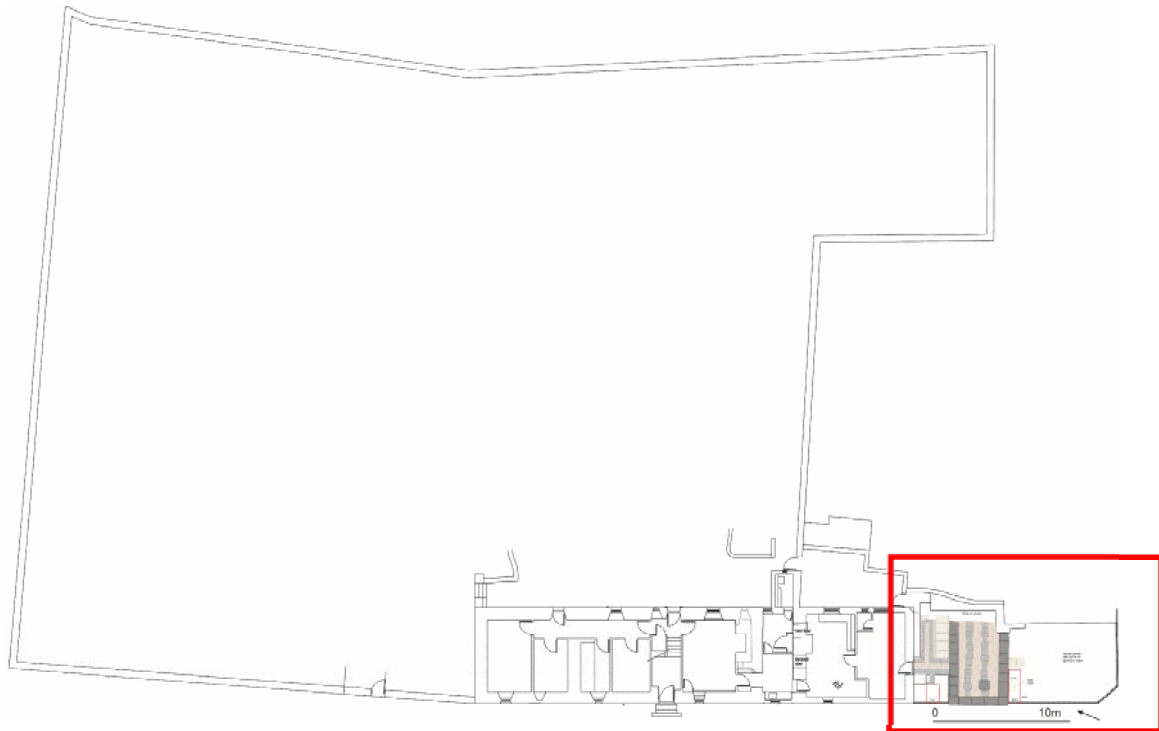
- 1.1 Consideration is being given to the replacement of the railings around the small south garden of Chaplain's Court at the corner between the Chanonry and Don Street. As this small garden area covers the site of one of the corner towers of the 16th-century Chaplain's Court, it was proposed that some preliminary archaeological assessment of the site should take place to inform any works in connection with the new railings and garden design.
- 1.2 Informal discussions took place between Murray Archaeological Services Ltd and Bruce Mann, Archaeologist for Aberdeenshire Council and currently also responsible for archaeological aspects of planning within Aberdeen City Council area. It was agreed that it would be useful to excavate test pits on the line of the perimeter along the Chanonry, where the documentary evidence shows the original building extended. The purpose of the test pits was to determine if any wall foundations were extant.
- 1.3 It was also agreed that the existing hard surfaces of the garden should be recorded in case these in any way reflected earlier wall lines.
- 1.4 Murray Archaeological Services Ltd was commissioned to undertake the work by David Chouman Architect on behalf of his clients Professor Claude Wischik & Mrs Irene Wischik. The site elements of the recording were undertaken on the 16th and 21st July 2015.

2. Desk-top survey

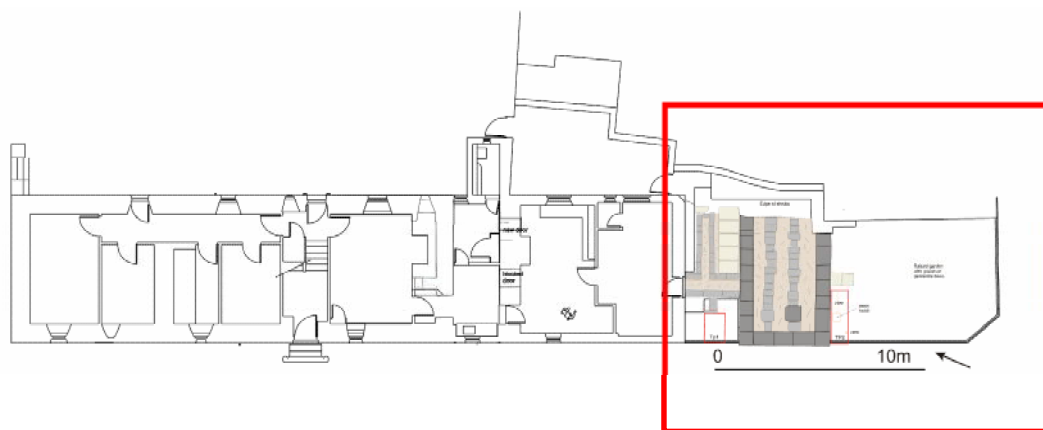
- 2.1 As a comprehensive desk top survey had been undertaken in 2013 (Murray & Murray 2014, 10-20), no further documentary work was done at this time.
- 2.2 In summary, this SW area of the property appears to have been the location of the S tower of the quadrangle of buildings that formed the Chaplain's Court from c.1519. Originally the tower and range of lower buildings N of the now blocked pend archway were mirrored S of the pend arch up to the corner of Don Street. By Gordon's map of 1661 (1661) parts of this SW corner may already have been derelict. The 1st OS map of 1866-7 shows this area as open ground, with a well at the Chanonry/Don Street corner. The well is not shown on the 1899 OS map and Meldrum (1987) writes that it disappeared in 1888. Meldrum dates the well to the late 18th century and suggests that it was similar to the well at the Cathedral Gate, built of ashlar granite with a square base.

3. The Site

- 3.1 Chaplain's Court, 20 The Chanonry, is situated on the E side of The Chanonry extending to its junction with Don Street, Old Aberdeen. It is a Category B Listed Building (HB No: 20200) within Aberdeen City Council's Conservation Area 1: Old Aberdeen.
- Parish: Aberdeen
- NGR NJ 94046 08661
- RCAHMS No: NJ90NW 9.04



Illus 1 Garden area (red) in relation to site plan



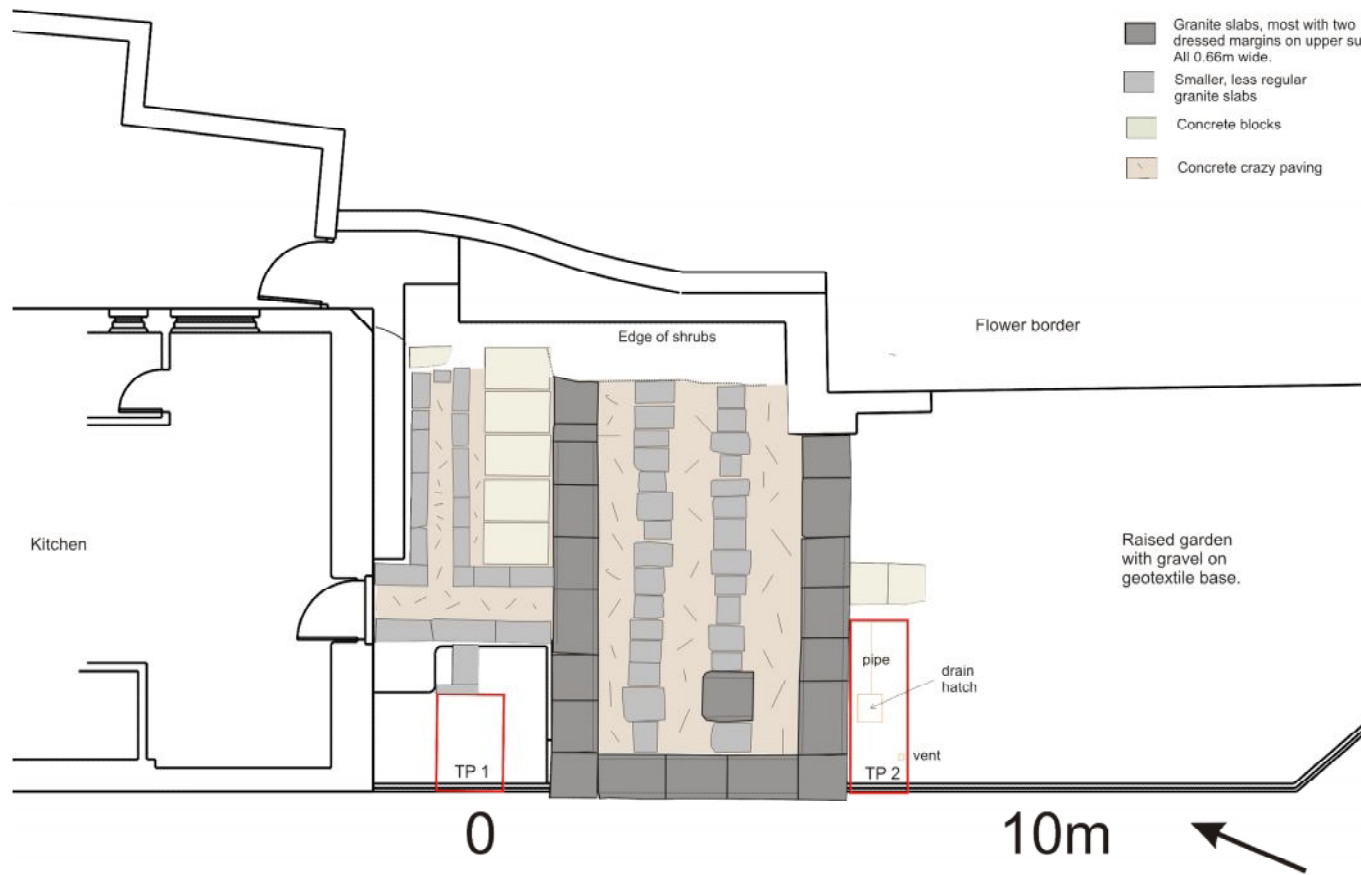
Illus 2 Garden area (red) in relation to house

4 Methodology

- 4.1 Two test pits were excavated by hand, both on the line of the Chanonry frontage and TP2 also near the possible line of the N wall of the S tower. The details of the test pits were recorded and are detailed below.
- 4.2 The ground plan of the existing paving was also planned and recorded in some detail.

- 4.3 Site plans were kindly supplied by David Chouman Architect and have been annotated and used as a basis for detailed plans of the observed areas.

5 Results



Illus 3 Plan of paving and location of test pits TP1 and TP2

5.1 THE TEST PITS

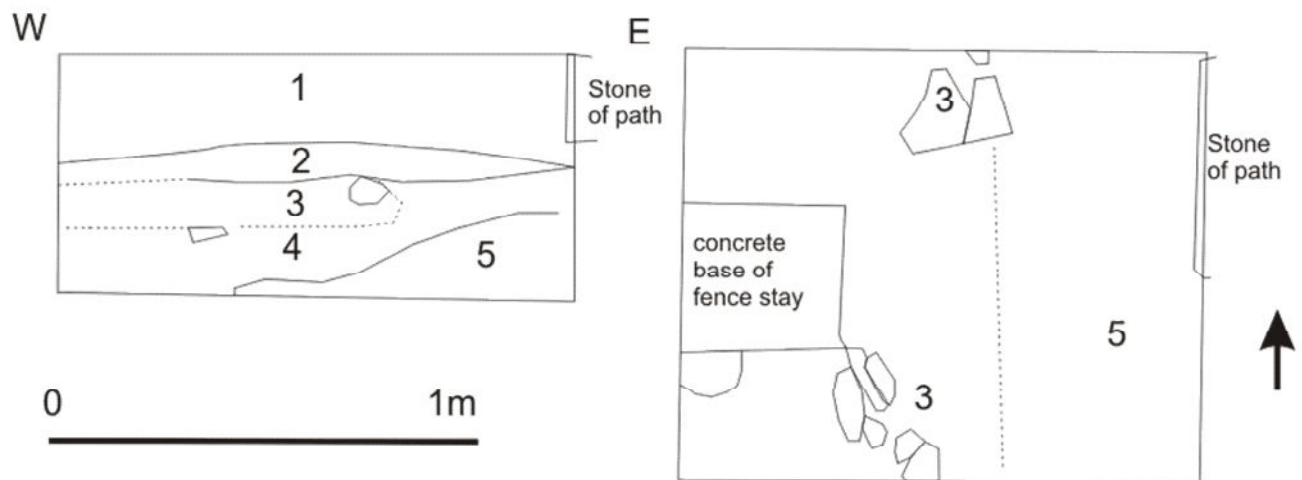
Test pit TP1

TP1 was located along the Chanonry frontage, its N edge being c.0.90m from the end wall of the house.

N/S: 1m x E/W: 1.2m



Illus 4 TP 1 looking W to Chanonry. Context 3&4 along W side



Illus 5 TP1 Plan and section

Stratigraphy

- 1 Topsoil 200-240mm
- 2 Sandier mixed loam with cinders, some glass. <80mm
- 3 Harder sand with small stones. Appeared to form N/S band but disturbed on W (dotted) and very mixed with 4. May be a dump within 4. <80mm

- 4 Yellow sandy mix with some slate and pantile. Disturbed to W and mixed into 3. <120mm
- 5 E side only. Cut or overlain by 3 & 4. Dark soft loam, some animal bone. <200mm. Extends below paving to E.

Natural- hard yellow clay.

At E side one of path stones was 200mm thick.



Illus 6 TP1 N section.



Illus 7 TP 1. E section showing context 5 below paving



Illus 8 TP 1. Excavated to natural.

Interpretation.

Topsoil (1) overlay a thin spread of domestic rubbish (2), probably cinders from a kitchen range. The topsoil would have been spread when the area became formalised into a garden, probably in the 20th century.

This overlay the very mixed layers 3 and 4. While the top of 3 appeared to be quite compact, the two layers were possibly parts of a levelling dump of material produced when the single storey kitchen extension was built, probably in the 19th century (It appears on Wood's map of 1828 (Murray & Murray 2014,15).

It is possible that the apparent dip or cut in which 3 and 4 are deposited may indicate the robbed out line of the front wall of the 16th-century building. However the evidence is ephemeral and interpretation depends more on the knowledge of the wall line than on the evidence of the stratigraphy.

Layer 5, which appears to have been cut by layers 3 & 4, contained no datable material but the presence of animal bone from domestic waste is very much what might be expected if this was part of a waste-land spread on land between buildings. This appears to extend below the paving and would be worth observing when the paving is removed.

Test pit TP2

TP2 was located at right angles to the Chanonry frontage, its W edge being c.6.9m and 7.8m from the end wall of the house. Its N edge lay alongside 4 of the stones in the S line of granite paving slabs.

N/S: 0.90m x E/W: 2.4m



Illus 9 TP 2 in relation to The Chanonry, looking W



Illus 10 TP 2. Drain in relation to Don Street houses

Stratigraphy

With the exception of c.200mm projecting from the E end of the N side of the test pit, below the granite slabs of the paving, all of TP 2 proved to be backfill (2) into the

trench of a ceramic drain running E/W at right angles to the Chanonry. A drain hatch and gas vent related to the pipe, were also exposed. The pipe cut, which was 700mm wide, had been cut into natural yellow clay. The natural was at c.600mm below the present surface. The top of the pipe itself was at 1.05m below the top of the present paving.

- 1 Topsoil
- 2 Disturbed backfill of pipe trench
- 3 Pipe trench

The small area at the E end of the N side, below the paving showed:

- 4 c. 280mm of dirty garden soil with some ashes and domestic waste, similar to TP1, layer 2.
- 5 Below this there was c.200mm of mortar and small stone fragments directly onto natural. A single small rimsherd of post-medieval pottery was found in this layer.
Rimsherd of a bowl, Scottish Redware, internally glazed. 15th-16th century.



Illus 11 TP 2 Context 4 & 5 below paving (RHS) in N section

5.2 THE EXISTING PAVING



Illus 12 Paving looking E from existing entrance

The paving comprised five main elements:

- 1 U-shape of large, regular, granite slabs, the base of the U along the frontage
- 2 Two less regular lines of smaller, more varied granite slabs running E/W
- 3 Smaller stone slabs bordering the path to the back door and between the door and the gate to the main gardens.
- 4 A small number of large concrete slabs
- 5 Concrete crazy paving infill

The well-dressed slabs on the frontage and in the two main E/W lines of paving (Illus 3: darker grey on plan- only one identified in the less regular paving) are all of the same width (0.66m) and many show signs of dressed and worn margins c.100mm wide along both 'long' sides. The three that were alongside TP2 were all a regular 130mm (5") thick. They varied in length between 0.23 and 1.06m and the total linear length was a little over 14m if set end to end. (Lengths: 0.41m+, 0.91m, 0.72m, 0.71m, 0.59m, 0.99m, 0.71m, 1.06m, 0.90m, 0.96m, 0.68m, 0.73m, 0.68m, 0.72m, 0.69m, 0.79m, 0.67m, 0.23m, 0.64m+, 0.70m.).

It is possible that they were a projecting foundation for a slightly narrower wall but this is purely speculative.



Illus 13 Depth of paving beside TP 2 N section



Illus 14 Paving looking N. Dressed margins visible on stone slabs above ranging rod



Illus 15 Details of margins on large slabs

5.3 SLATE SLABS

Two slate slabs found in the garden were also recorded. Both are of very fine grey slate. Their relationship to the Chaplain's Court is not known. As the number '3' is of different size on each slab, it is perhaps less likely that they were a matching pair.

Slab 1 (top in both photographs. Illus 16, 17)

425 x 260 x 30mm

3 incised on front: 40mm high

Reverse : groove 30mm wide and 10mm deep. Broken

Slab 2 (bottom in both photographs. Illus 16, 17)

425 x 255 x 30mm

3 incised on front: 45mm high

Reverse: groove 25mm wide and 10mm deep.



Illus 16 Slate slabs. Front



Illus 17 Slate slabs. Reverse

6 Discussion of archaeological potential

Test pits TP1 and TP 2 did not yield any structural remains of the SW end of Chaplain's Court. However, the very ephemeral possibility of the robbed wall

foundation trench in TP1 and the layers TP1, context 5 and TP 2, context 5, may include material relating to the post-medieval period.

The paving does not appear to lie directly along the lines of any earlier structural remains, or be placed to mark their position. Some estimate may be made of the position of the S tower by 'mirroring' the N tower; this would indicate that the N wall of the S tower might have been near to the line of TP2 but there was no evidence to confirm this from the present investigation..

The large stone slabs with dressed margins do not appear to be paralleled on the standing building and their origin is unknown. They may have come from some demolished part of Chaplain's Court but could equally have been imported to the site from elsewhere, not necessarily in Old Aberdeen.

Suggested mitigations

There is little evidence of undisturbed archaeology. However, as the ground is likely to be cleared and levelled in the course of creating the new garden and hard standing, it would be advisable to have an archaeological watching brief and recording of exposed levels.

References

- Gordon, J 1661 *Abredoniae novae et veteris descriptio* <http://maps.nls.uk/towns>
Meldrum, E 1987 *Aberdeen of Old*. Aberdeen.
Murray, H K & Murray, J C 2014 *Chaplain's Court, 20 The Chanonry, Old Aberdeen*. MAS 2013-13. Report in Aberdeen City SMR.

Archive

A full set of photographs will be supplied to the City of Aberdeen SMR, to the NMRS and to the owners.

The photographic catalogue is in Appendix 1 of this report.

Appendix 1: Photographic Catalogue

Chaplain's Court S garden	
001-002	TP 1 before excavation, looking to street
003-005	TP 1 looking W, context 3
006-007	TP 1 general
008-012	TP 1 stones of context 3
013-017	TP 1 natural (not context 3)
018-020	TP 1 N section
021-025	TP1 E section showing context 5
026-027	TP 2 general view at context 2
028-029	TP 2, context 2
030-035	TP2. Pipe and pipe trench. Paving slabs at LHS with context 5 below
036	Site recording
037-038	TP 2 Paving slab with context 5 below
039-042	Paving looking E from existing gate
043-045	Paving looking N to kitchen door
046-053	Detail of large paving slabs to show dressed/smooth margins
054-059	Slate slabs found in garden
060-065	Reverse of slate slabs