

**HISTORIC SCOTLAND PROPERTIES IN CARE
MINOR ARCHAEOLOGICAL WORKS 2011**

Arbroath Abbey: Excavation and Watching Brief, May 2011.

HS PIC Index Number: 90018

SITE: Arbroath Abbey, Arbroath.

N.G.R.: NO 6429 4129; NO 6430 4124

DESCRIPTION: Excavation and Watching Brief relating to the installation of new signage within the southern area of the Abbey.

PROJECT CODE: HSCO-90018-2011-01

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4 Western Terrace, Murrayfield, Edinburgh EH12 5QF.

JUNE 2011

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INTRODUCTION

Under the terms of its Properties In Care (PIC) call-off contract, Kirkdale Archaeology was asked by Historic Scotland to undertake some work at Arbroath Abbey (Fig. 1), namely the excavation of a trench in the path heading E from the Abbot's House and a watching brief on another excavation a short way E of the well, in the S part of the grounds.

The trenches were intended for new information boards; the one to the N (Trench 1) was to be excavated archaeologically by hand, while the one to the S (Trench 2) was on the site of an earlier board, which was to be removed by Historic Scotland staff under archaeological supervision.

The work took place on 31st May 2011.

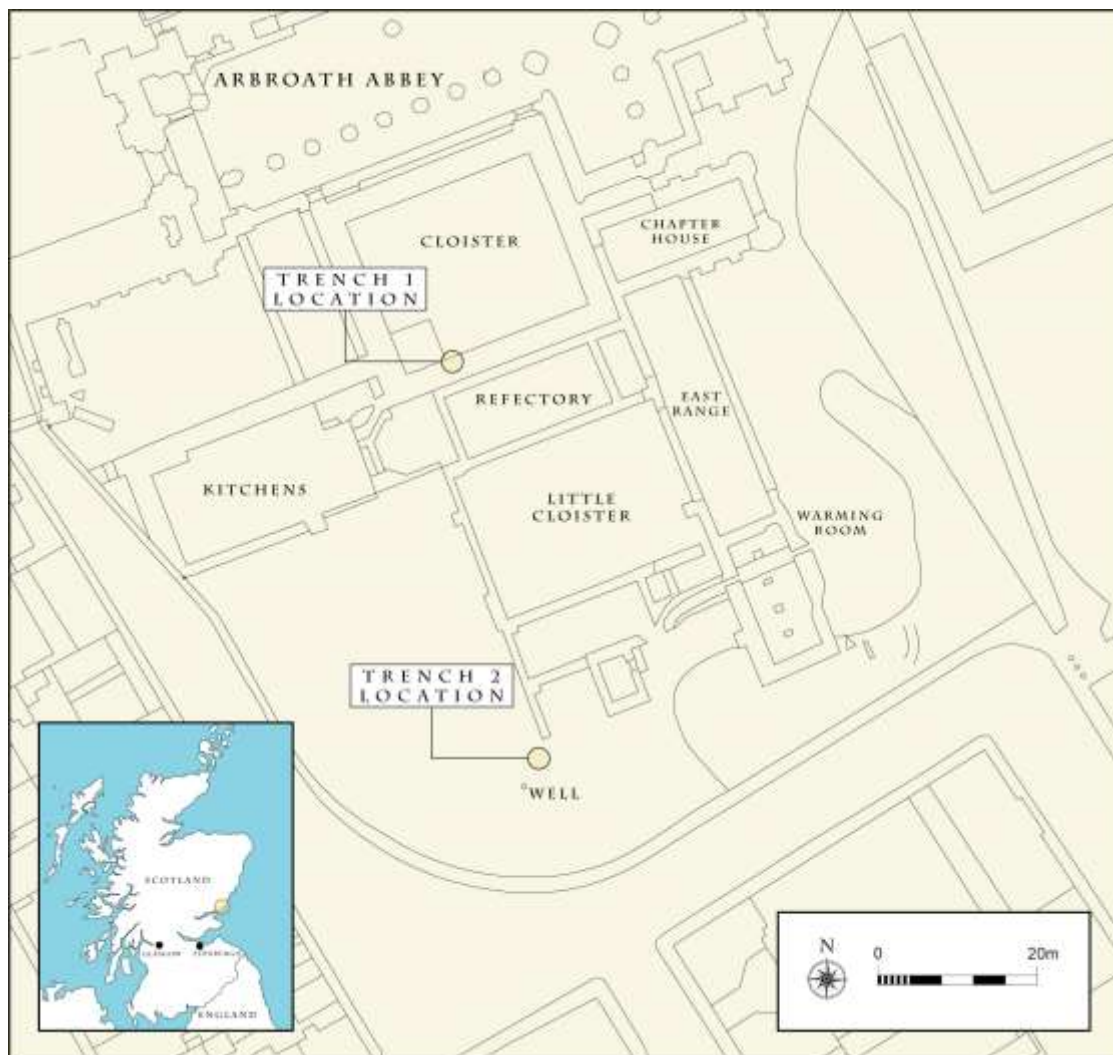


Figure 1: Location map of Arbroath Abbey, and the present works.

DESCRIPTION

TRENCH 1 (see Fig.1 and Fig.2)

This trench was located 6.3m E of the SW corner of the Cloister. It measured 1m E/W x 0.8m N/S and was up to 0.5m deep.

The upper material **103**, was a grey sand and gravel deposit measuring 4cm - 5cm thick. Context **103** sealed a 6cm thick deposit of a quite compact grey silty sand, **104**. Contexts **103** and **104** were against the S face of the S wall of the Cloister, **101**. The Cloister wall **101** measured 0.5m wide and the exposed part was only a single course (0.25m) thick. Directly below **101** there was a 0.13m thick band of concrete, **102**. Sealed by **104** and cut against **101**, context **118** was a 'U' shaped cut. This context (**118**) measured 0.15m both in width and depth and carried a 5cm diameter, grey plastic coated, cable. Cut by **118**, context **105** was a 6cm thick deposit of gravel and grey ash with occasional small pieces of slag. Context **105** sealed a quite compact deposit of light brown silty sand, **106**, measuring 0.1m in thickness. Under **106**, context **107** comprised gravel and grey ash, and was quite compact. Context **107** measured 5cm - 6cm in depth. Directly below **107**, context **108** was an 8cm thick deposit of a mid-brown sand that contained many lumps of red sandstone. The final deposit excavated, **109**, was orange brown sand containing many dark brown patches, and measured 6cm in depth. At the limit of excavation **110** was a similar deposit to **109**, but the dark brown patches in this feature appeared to have more shape to them; they were assigned context numbers in the range **111 - 117**.

TRENCH 2 (see Fig.1 and Fig.2)

Trench 2 was located to the NE of the Well. It measured approximately 1m E/W x 0.6m N/S and was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.43m.

Historic Scotland staff removed the concrete that had been used for the previous sign. They continued removing further material, but it was apparent that *in situ* archaeological deposits were being encountered at a depth of approximately 0.4m, so the remainder of the trench was excavated archaeologically. The current turf and light-mid grey sandy loam topsoil, **201**, measured 0.12m thick. Context **201** sealed **202**, a fairly loose light-mid brown sandy loam. Context **202** was up to 0.3m thick. At the base of the trench **203** was a very

compact surface of stones and mid-brown sand, with yellow brown sand and clay patches throughout. Context **203** was not excavated as the required depth had been met; it was covered before the concrete was poured.

CONCLUSIONS

TRENCH 1

Phase 1

Deposit **110** is probably either subsoil or re-deposited subsoil; it was not excavated and there was no real indication during this work as to which was more likely. The local members of staff thought that this area had been raised 'considerably'. Cleaning over it, the impression was that it may well be *in situ* subsoil, indicating the total depth of make-up here is 0.5m.

Deposit **109** nominally sealed contexts **111 - 117**, but there were patches of material similar to these features within it. It is entirely possible context **109** is the same deposit as **110** but with more root/animal disturbance.

Phase 2

Contexts **111 - 117** may have been features cut into **110**, but it is more likely that they are burrows or root staining within that deposit. There was no regular pattern discernible nor was there a consistent size or shape to these 'features'. This was however a small trench, and it may be that if a larger area was opened a pattern could emerge. The voiding of **011** could be consistent with it being a stake hole, animal burrow or root hole.

Phase 3

Directly above **009** deposit **008** contained a lot of red sandstone lumps that are thought likely to be from the Abbey. This is probably construction or demolition material, though with only the material from Phases 1 and 2 below **008**, there seems no reason (from this excavation) that it could not indeed be construction waste. One problem with differentiating between the two is that while the lack of large stones may usually point toward construction material, it seems clear in Arbroath that a lot of buildings have 'borrowed' heavily from the Abbey, thereby removing the most reusable stones from any demolition. It is also possible

that context **008** has been imported as a base for the gravel and ash layer **007**. Context **007** formed a fairly flat surface, and may have been part of an earlier path.

Phase 4

Context **006** is thought to be make-up for **005**, which may be another phase of path. Context **005** was 0.12m below the present ground surface and 0.12m above context **007**. Wall **001** was a single course construction, presumably a fairly recent marking out of where the structure was thought to have stood. Context **002** represented the concrete foundation for **001**. It appears likely that the surface **005** has raised the ground surface from the Phase 4 levels (when **001** was constructed).

Phase 5

This is the latest phase of features within this trench. Context **018** was the trench for what appears to be a telephone cable; this was probably for a phone in the Abbot's House. Context **003** was the sand and gravel base for the current path, and **004** represented levelling prior to it being laid. The orange gravel of the current path had been scraped away prior to excavation. Context **018** cut through the Phase 4 surface **005** and was sealed by **004**. It could therefore be earlier than the current path.

TRENCH 2

This trench was a some distance to the S of Trench 1. There are no apparent stratigraphical links nor dateable finds recovered. It is therefore not possible to discuss the separate trenches under the same scheme of phasing. Thus, the phases in this trench are designated 1, 2 and 3, but relate only to the sequence within this trench.

Phase 1

At the limit of excavation in this trench **203** was a hard, fairly even surface that sloped down slightly at the E and W ends. It was not possible to tell if this was a structural feature, but it was decided to leave it *in situ* and leave the trench slightly shallower than was originally intended in order to preserve it. It could represent the remains of a path or the top of a large drain. It was also noted that the trench dug for the previous sign had not damaged **203**.

Phase 2

Deposit **202** looks to have been imported, perhaps as garden soil; it had raised the ground surface by around 0.25m above the Phase 1 structure. This may be the post-demolition tidying of the S part of the Abbey grounds.

Phase 3

The current turf and topsoil - represented by context **201**.

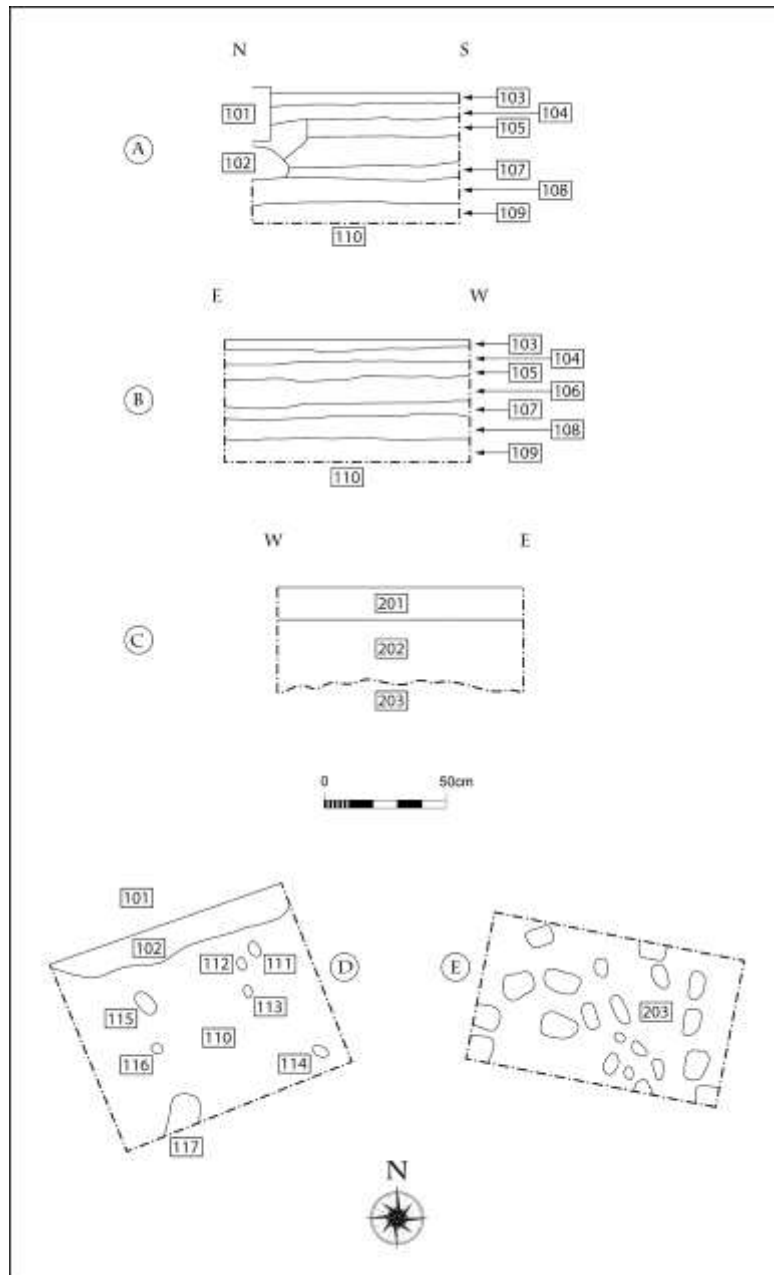


Figure 2: A) W-facing section in Trench 1, B) N-facing section in Trench 1, C) S-facing section in Trench 2, D) Post-excavation plan of Trench 1, E) Post-excavation plan of Trench 2.

LIST OF CONTEXTS

No.	Description
101	S wall of the Cloister/Lavatorium.
102	Foundations for 001.
103	Grey sand and gravel, base of current path.
104	Quite compact grey silty sand - bottoming for current path.
105	Gravel and ash, possible path.
106	Light brown silty sand, make-up for 005.
107	Gravel and ash, possible path.
108	Mid brown silty sand, make-up for 007.
109	Orange brown sand with many dark patches - re-deposited subsoil?
110	Orange brown sand, possible subsoil.
111	Dark area within 110 at the limit of excavation. Roughly oval, measuring 6cm N/S x 4cm wide and over 10cm deep.
112	Dark area within 110 at the limit of excavation. Sub-rectangular, measuring 8cm N/S x 4cm, unexcavated.
113	Dark area within 110 at the limit of excavation. Seen in an oval area 6cm N/S x 4cm, unexcavated.
114	Dark area within 110 at the limit of excavation. Sub-rectangular, 6cm E/W x 4cm, unexcavated.
115	Dark area within 110 at the limit of excavation. Roughly oval, 9cm x 6cm, unexcavated.
116	Dark area within 110 at the limit of excavation. Roughly oval, 6cm x 4cm, unexcavated.
117	Dark area within 110 at the limit of excavation. Emerged from the S baulk and extended 12cm N. It measured 9cm E/W, unexcavated.
118	'U' shaped cut for a telephone cable.
201	Current turf and topsoil.
202	Fairly loose light-mid brown sandy loam - earlier garden soil?
203	Very compact surface of stones and mid-brown sand.

LIST OF DRAWINGS

No.	Type	Description	Scale
1	Plan	Location of Trench 1.	1:50
2	Plan	Location of Trench 2.	1:20
3	Section	W-facing section in Trench 1.	1:20
4	Section	N-facing section in Trench 1.	1:20
5	Plan	Post-excavation plan of Trench 1.	1:20
6	Section	S-facing section in Trench 2.	1:20
7	Plan	Post-excavation plan of Trench 2.	1:20

LIST OF DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHS

No.	Description	From	Date
01	Trench 1, post-excavation.	S	31/05/2011
02	N-facing section in Trench 1.	N	31/05/2011
03	Location of Trench 1, with the Abbot's House to the W.	E	31/05/2011
04	Trench 2, post-excavation.	N	31/05/2011
05	Location of Trench 2, with the Well to the W.	E	31/05/2011