

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

Melrose Abbey Priory Farm: Test Pit, August 2011.

HS PIC Index Number: 90214

SITE: Melrose Abbey Priory Farm, Melrose.

N.G.R.: NT 5483 3432

DESCRIPTION: Examination of the basal courses of the E courtyard wall.

PROJECT CODE: HSCO-90214-2011-01

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4 Western Terrace, Murrayfield, Edinburgh EH12 5QF.

AUGUST 2011

INTRODUCTION

Under the terms of its Properties In Care (PIC) call-off contract with Historic Scotland, Kirkdale Archaeology was asked to undertake an archaeological watching brief during the excavation of a test pit (henceforth referred to as 'trench') at Melrose Abbey Priory Farm, located on the E face of the E courtyard wall towards its S end (Fig.1). The excavation was undertaken initially by Historic Scotland staff, and excavated to the final depth and recorded by the site archaeologist. The purpose of the trench was to examine the wall footing of this section of the courtyard wall, in the hope of shedding light on the cause of a pronounced lean to the E in the masonry of the wall. The work was undertaken on 7th July 2011.

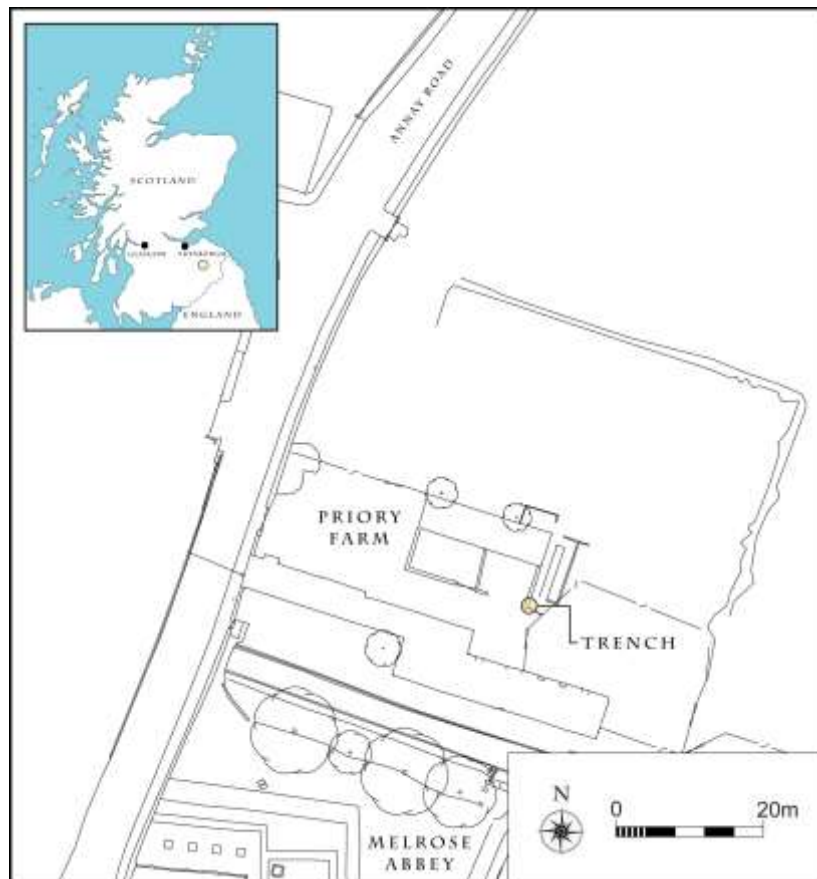


Figure 1: Plan showing the location of Melrose Abbey Priory Farm, along with the site of the present works.

DESCRIPTION

The trench measured 0.5m NE/SW x 0.5m NW/SE and was 0.5m N of the S end of the courtyard wall. It was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.7m. A grey brown firm deposit of soil and occasional pebbles **001** was removed to a depth of 0.4m. It abutted the face of the courtyard wall with no visible sign of any foundation cut for the wall. Context **001** gave way to **002** – a compacted and cleaner version of **001** which extended to the limit of excavation (for another 0.3m). There was some evidence of a disturbed area immediately adjacent to the masonry of the courtyard wall, characterised by a slightly more soft fill, although this was very similar to **002**. This deposit **003** may represent a shallow foundation cut for the E courtyard wall. The wall itself was faced to the same level as the top of **002** (*i.e.* to a depth of *c.* 0.4m below current ground level). At that point the masonry projected from the wall face over three rough courses – probably representing foundations of the wall, set in turn within a shallow cut defined by context **003**.

Observation of the E face of the E courtyard wall suggested that it may have been an addition to the E gable of the N range of structures, and it in turn it had featured a series of timber elements. These are reflected by a series of at least five shallow recesses in the wall face – perhaps reflecting a timber platform or fencing/stalls which extended E of the courtyard itself (Fig.2).



Figure 2: The E-facing, exterior elevation of the E wall of the courtyard. The shallow recesses are highlighted. The image is a composite and *not to scale*.

CONCLUSIONS

The reasons for the lean of the wall to the E is not due to unstable soils abutting the face, nor to movement within the foundation layer of the wall itself. Both contexts **001** and **002** were found to be compact and solid deposits. It is possible that the ground level has been raised since the construction of the E courtyard wall, on the basis that it is faced well below the present ground surface. The extent of landscaping E of the courtyard wall is suggested by a possible terrace projecting eastwards towards the paddock. There was no apparent destabilising effect from historic flooding or residual water courses associated with the present mill lade. Only modern finds including china and bottle glass were found in the upper 0.25m of **001** – none of which were retained.

The origins of the distortion evident in the lean of the wall appear to be associated with the N range of structures with their wide open S facades and use of large timber elements. The pressure from this range appears to have pushed the E gable out (to the E), which in turn has pulled the associated E courtyard wall with it.

LIST OF CONTEXTS

No.	Description
001	Grey brown firm deposit of soil and occasional pebbles, 0.4m deep.
002	Compacted and cleaner version of 001.
003	Disturbed area immediately adjacent to the masonry of the courtyard wall, characterised by a slightly more soft fill - but very similar to 002. Possible excavation cut.

LIST OF DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHS

No.	Description	From	Date
01	Trench.	E	7/7/2011
02	Trench.	N	7/7/2011
03	Trench.	S	7/7/2011
04	Trench.	E	7/7/2011
05	View into the trench.	E	7/7/2011
06	Elevation of E courtyard wall.	E	7/7/2011
07	Elevation of E courtyard wall.	E	7/7/2011
08	Elevation of E courtyard wall.	E	7/7/2011
09	Elevation of E courtyard wall and E gable.	E	7/7/2011