

**HISTORIC SCOTLAND PROPERTIES IN CARE
MINOR ARCHAEOLOGICAL WORKS 2014/2015**

Elgin Cathedral • Monitoring • March 2014

HS PIC Index Number: 90142

SITE: Elgin Cathedral, Elgin

N.G.R.: NJ 2215 6302

DESCRIPTION: Watching Brief during the removal of an existing access ramp and two stone steps for the installation of a new path leading from the graveyard to the S porch of Elgin Cathedral.

PROJECT CODE: HSCO-90142-2014-01

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MAY 2014

INTRODUCTION

Under the terms of its PIC call-off contract with Historic Scotland, Kirkdale Archaeology was asked to undertake an Archaeological Watching Brief at Elgin Cathedral in Moray during the removal of an existing wooden access ramp and two sandstone steps giving access from the graveyard to the S porch of the cathedral (Fig.1).

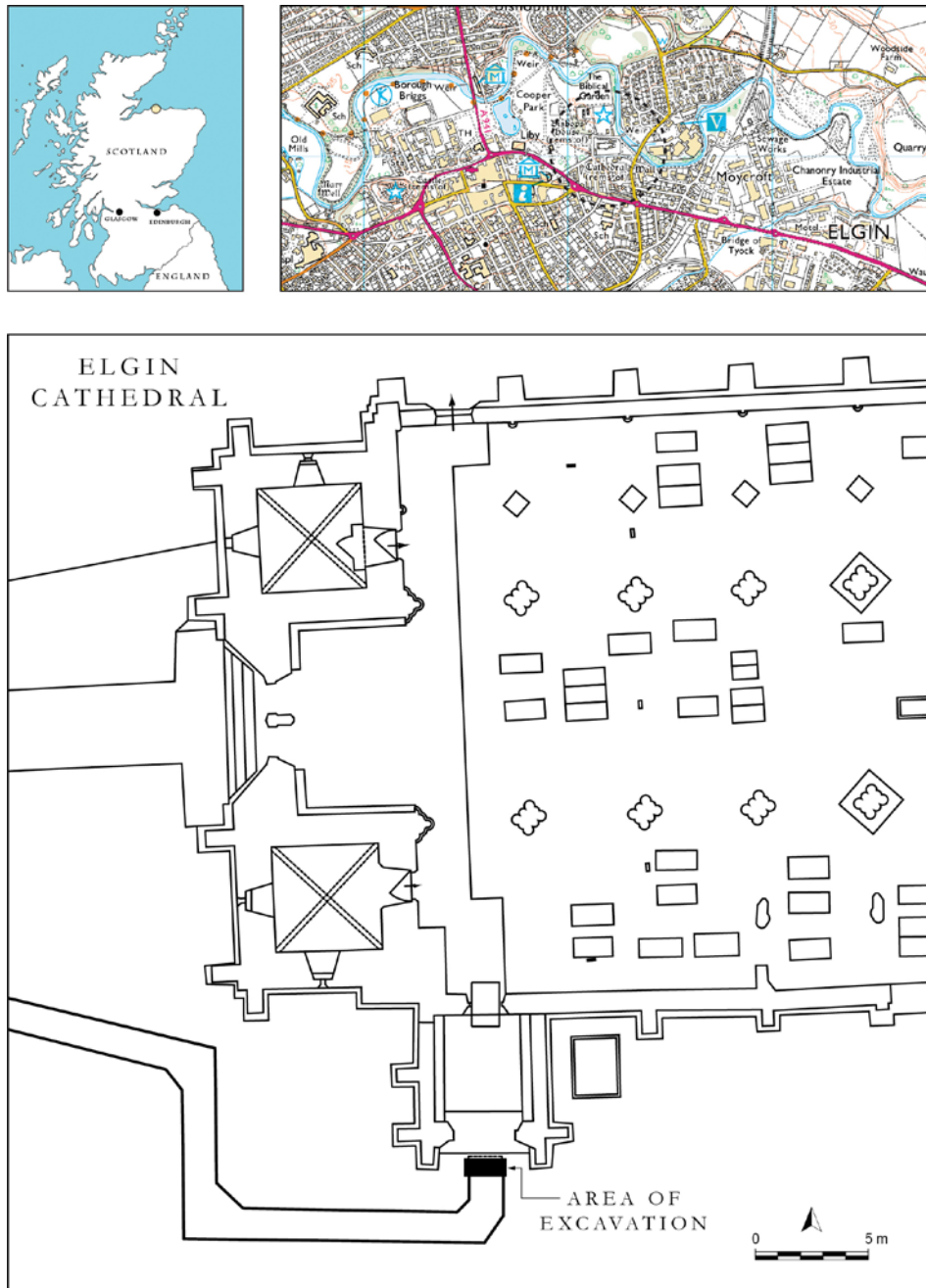


Figure 1: Plan showing the location of the trench.
Inset No. 2 © Crown copyright. All rights reserved 2014. Licence number 100036933.

Thereafter, the path to the S of the steps was to be graded down from S to N and a new path laid on geotextile membrane.

Prior to their removal, it was noted that the lower edge of the upper step carried a concave moulding. When the two steps were removed and turned over it was revealed that they formed the two halves of a split grave stone dated 1724.

The excavations were carried out manually by Historic Scotland staff under archaeological supervision, and the work was carried out on 19 March 2014.

DESCRIPTION

Prior to excavation, an existing wooden walkway with a handrail was removed and set aside. The upper step **001** was then levered onto wooden rollers and moved with stone slings. The step was a block of yellowish grey sandstone 1.80m long x 0.40m wide x 0.20m thick with a smooth dressed upper face and sides, and it was noted before removal that it carried a concave moulding on its lower outer edge. When the stone was turned over it became apparent that this was a re-used grave slab. The lower step **002** was then similarly levered onto wooden rollers and moved with stone slings. The step was again a block of yellowish grey sandstone 1.80m long x 0.40m wide x 0.20m thick with a smooth dressed upper face and sides. The grave slab could have been of simple ledger type or part of a table tomb or chest tomb. The inscription indicated that it marked (before being re-used) *'the burial place of Andrew Russel merchant in Elgin and Elspeth his spouse and their children'* and was dated 1724 (see Plate 1).



Plate 1: Step 001 (below) and step 002 (above) formed from two halves of an early-18th century grave slab

The upper step **001** had been bedded on stone pads to the E and W. The E pad **003** was a block of sandstone 40cm x 40cm x 17cm thick, while the W pad **004** was of similar dimensions but carried concave mouldings on one of its faces. It was not clear whether this was originally part of the (destroyed) cathedral, or part of a grave stone; it did not have to be moved as part of the works and was thus left *in situ*.

The soft deposits which had been used to help bed the two steps and fill the gap between the E and W pads were then removed. This layer consisted of a re-deposited mix of sandstone rubble in a matrix of sand, silt and mortar **005**. This material, along with the E and W pads had been cut into, and placed over, a buried reduced wall line **006**. The wall ran E/W and was 40cm thick N/S. The wall consisted of blocks of sandstone rubble bonded in whitish-yellow lime mortar, suggesting a relatively crude foundation, as opposed to the ashlar work found around the cathedral. It was only exposed for the 1.80m length required for removing the lower step and as such, its relationship to the S porch was not determined. A wall line is shown in this position on the 1868 Large Scale OS Town Plan of Elgin (Fig.2).

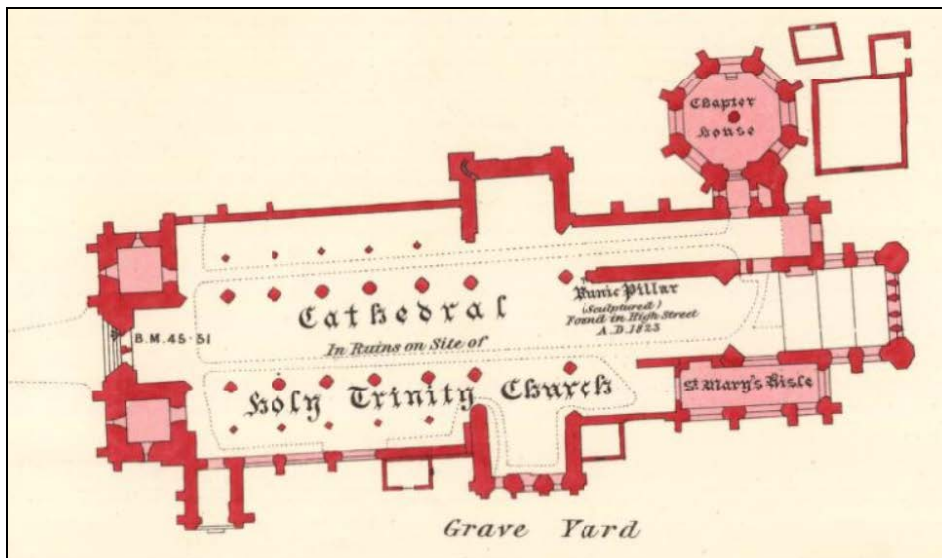


Figure 2: Wall line running E/W between the S buttresses of the S porch on the 1868 OS Town Plan of Elgin (detail)

To the N and S of the buried wall line was a compact layer of mortar-and-charcoal flecked yellowish brown silty clay **007**. This was not excavated, but recorded and photographed *in situ*. Having removed the steps, all that remained was to grade the path to the S to allow the new access to slope gently downwards. This was cleared through the modern path make-up **008** of whin dust over mixed stony silt, 5cm deep to the S and 15cm deep to the N path edge. Within this make-up was an electricity cable **009** running SW/NE.

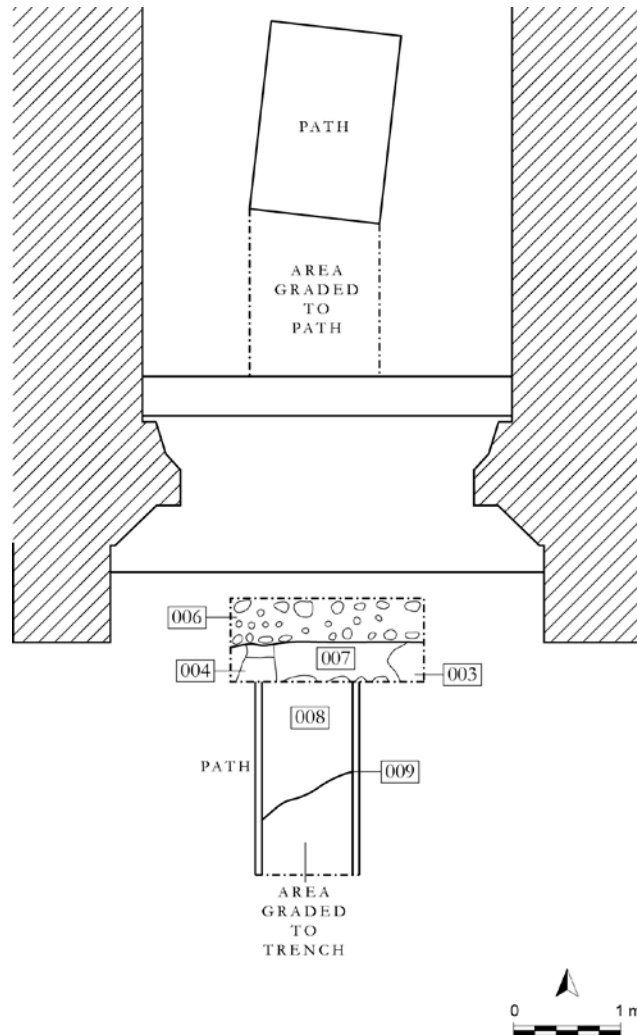


Figure 2: Post-excavation plan of the trench.

CONCLUSIONS

The excavation has shown that there has been some recycling of grave slabs and building demolition debris within this portion of the cathedral grounds. The stone steps formed from the split grave slab were probably emplaced in the late 19th century, at some time after the arrangement as shown on the 1868 plan. Due to the high archaeological potential of the site it is recommended that any further ground-breaking works should be similarly accompanied by an Archaeological Watching Brief.

LIST OF CONTEXTS

Number	Description
001	Upper step – half of a split yellowish grey early-18 th century sandstone grave slab
002	Lower step – half of a split yellowish grey early-18 th century sandstone grave slab
003	E sandstone pad under 001
004	W sandstone pad under 001
005	Bedding material/infill for 001 and 002- sandstone rubble in a matrix of sand, silt and mortar
006	Buried E/W wall line
007	Compact layer of mortar-and-charcoal flecked yellowish-brown silty clay
008	Path make-up

LIST OF DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHS

No.	Description	From	Date
1	Pre-excavation view of the S porch and existing access ramp	N	19/03/2014
2	Pre-excavation view of the upper step and existing access ramp	N	19/03/2014
3	Pre-excavation view of the upper step and existing access ramp	E	19/03/2014
4	Pre-excavation view of the existing access ramp and path	S	19/03/2014
5	Pre-excavation view of the existing access ramp and path	S	19/03/2014
6	Pre-excavation view of the S porch and existing access ramp	NW	19/03/2014
7	Pre-excavation view of the existing access ramp and path	SE	19/03/2014
8	Access ramp removed	N	19/03/2014
9	Removing upper step 001	E	19/03/2014
10	Removing upper step 001	SE	19/03/2014
11	Carved inscription on lower face of step 001	N/A	19/03/2014
12	Carved inscription on lower face of step 001	N/A	19/03/2014
13	E pad 003, W pad 004 and infill 005	S	19/03/2014
14	Trench after removal of 005	S	19/03/2014
15	Buried wall line 006 and deposit 007	S	19/03/2014
16	Buried wall line 006 and deposit 007	E	19/03/2014
17	Buried wall line 006 and deposit 007	S	19/03/2014
18	Buried wall line 006 and deposit 007	W	19/03/2014
19	Carved inscription on lower face of step 002	N/A	19/03/2014
20	Carved inscription on lower face of step 002	N/A	19/03/2014
21	Graded S path with electricity cable 009	S	19/03/2014
22	Post-excavation shot of trench and graded path	S	19/03/2014

LIST OF DRAWINGS

Number	Type	Description	Scale
001	Plan	Trench, post-excavation	1:50