

Scotia *Archaeology*

**REPORT
TO
SCOTTISH & SOUTHERN ENERGY**

**GLEBE FIELD
AND
QUEEN STREET
COUPAR ANGUS**

**Archaeological evaluation
November 2011**

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INTRODUCTION

This report describes the results of an archaeological evaluation undertaken within the Glebe Field at Queen Street, Coupar Angus, Perthshire. This work was commissioned by Allan Coburn of Scottish & Southern Energy (SSE) and carried out by John Lewis of Scotia Archaeology on 4th November 2011.

It was SSE's intention to replace a 200kVA transformer H-pole in the north-west corner of the Glebe Field which, together with the insertion of new cables, was likely to disrupt an area of ground that was once contained within, or located very close to, the precinct of the medieval abbey of Coupar Angus. As a consequence Perth & Kinross Council, on the advice of Perth & Kinross Heritage Trust (PKHT), imposed a condition whereby an archaeological field evaluation should be carried prior to the commencement of the refurbishment work.

The poles are due to be replaced on 15th November 2011 and, for reasons of safety, the bases of the extant poles were not exposed during the evaluation.

THE SITE

Coupar Angus Abbey, a daughter house of the Cistercian Abbey of Melrose, was founded in 1161/62 but suffered badly during the religious turmoil of the 16th and 17th centuries. Evidently, the monastic church continued in use after the Reformation but was rebuilt during the 17th century only to be demolished and replaced in 1859 by the church which stands today. The claustral ranges stood to the south of the monastic church although the only upstanding remains of the abbey's conventual buildings now comprise part of a gatehouse some 70m south of the extant church.

In 1993 an archaeological evaluation undertaken by AOC (Scotland) Ltd (O'Sullivan 1995) uncovered a large number of inhumations within the Glebe Field, the graves being left undisturbed thereafter and the trenches backfilled. The recent evaluation was located in the north-west corner of the field, some distance from AOC's trenches although the chance of exposing burials so close to a medieval monastery was considered relatively high.

The Glebe Field is reasonably level with occasional undulations and a gentle but distinct upward slope towards its north-west corner. It was under pasture at the time of the evaluation.

THE EVALUATION

The evaluation consisted of the excavation by machine of a trench running westwards from the H-pole (located at NO 22288 39818) in order to trace the routes of several existing cables (high- and low-voltage) which are to be replaced along with the pole itself. The trench was irregular in shape, its maximum measurements being 4m north/south by 5m east/west (see accompanying plan).

Below turf and up to 0.4m of dark brown, silty topsoil was a heterogeneous deposit, 0.5m deep, of topsoil, small rubble and lenses of silt and clay. It contained several disarticulated human bones together with numerous fragments of glass and ceramics, none predating the 19th century. The existing cables had been laid within this material to a depth of 0.6-0.7m below the turf, never reaching the underlying glacial till of red-brown silt with occasional fragments of red sandstone.

The bases of the two poles were not uncovered although it is thought likely that such large structures would have been set at a considerable depth, probably into previously undisturbed, glacially deposited materials.

The stratigraphic sequence in this part of the field differed markedly from that exposed further east and south during AOC's 1993 excavation where the burials, interpreted as medieval or early modern in date, may have cut deposits contemporary with the construction of the abbey. Artefacts retrieved from that excavation included a small number of medieval pottery sherds whereas none was recovered from the recent evaluation.

CONCLUSIONS

The results from the 2011 investigation suggest either that the cemetery through which the 1993 trenches cut did not extend as far as the north-west corner of the Glebe Field or that 19th-/20th-century disturbance has removed any burials there might have been in that area. The presence of disarticulated human bones in the recent evaluation trench might suggest the latter although it is thought more likely that they were the result of landscaping operations, perhaps associated with the construction of the church in the mid-19th century.

The cables running from the new H-pole will be laid at the same level as the existing ones and hence will disturb only 19th- and 20th-century deposits. Although the poles are set at a somewhat lower level, the installation of new ones is likely to cut only through materials of recent origin and underlying glacial deposits. As a consequence, it is suggested that no further archaeological intervention should be necessary during the remainder of this operation. However, past investigations show clearly that the surviving archaeological record only a short distance away from the 2011 trench dates back at least to the high medieval period and that all future ground disturbance in the Glebe Field should be monitored archaeologically.

REFERENCE

O'Sullivan 1995 'Abbey, market and cemetery; topographical notes on Coupar Angus in Perthshire, with a description of archaeological excavations on glebe lands by the parish church', *Proc Soc Antiq Scot* 125, 1045-68.

PHOTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVE

The photographs listed below form part of the project archive and are included only in digital versions of this report.

- 1 The north section of the trench, viewed from the east
- 2-4 The trench, viewed from the east
- 5-6 The trench, viewed from the south
- 7-8 The trench, viewed from the west
- 9-10 The trench, viewed from the north
- 11 The trench and poles, viewed from the south-east