

Scotia Archaeology

**REPORT
TO
MR RICHARD MURRAY**

**QUEEN'S CLOSE
MONTROSE**

**Watching brief
December 2011**

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INTRODUCTION

This report describes the results of an archaeological watching brief undertaken during excavations in advance of the construction of a new residence at Queen's Close, Montrose, Angus. Angus Council had granted planning consent to this project (Planning Reference Number 09/01138/FUL). The medieval burgh of Montrose once extended to within a short distance of this site and, as a consequence, the council, on the advice of the Aberdeenshire Archaeology Service, imposed a condition whereby ground-breaking activities associated with the development should be accompanied by an archaeological watching brief.

The development was sponsored by Mr Richard Murray who also carried out the excavation. The watching brief was carried out in the context of National Planning Policy Guidelines 5 (Archaeology and Planning) by John Lewis of Scotia Archaeology on 1st December 2011.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Montrose appears to have acquired burgh status some time in the 12th century, during the reign of David I (1124-53) (Barrow 1960, 92). There is some debate concerning this date although the general consensus is that the town was a royal burgh by 1178 (Pryde 1965, 7). During the Middle Ages, Montrose became an important port and trading centre and continued to grow into post-medieval times. By the 18th century, the town's prosperity was on a parallel with that of other large Scottish burghs, including Edinburgh and Glasgow.

The early burgh was centred on High Street with its church and market. The town's street plan expanded outwards from this wide, north/south thoroughfare from which Queen's Close runs eastwards to Baltic Street. Very little intrusive archaeology has been undertaken within this important burgh and recommendations were voiced some time ago to the effect that any opportunity to examine its buried archaeological record and history should be a consideration of the planning process (Gourlay & Turner 1978, 12-13).

The Queens's Close site lies just outside the limits of the medieval burgh, as was confirmed during excavations on the site of the former Star Garage, on the corner of New Wynd and Market Street, where evidence of the backlands of medieval plots was uncovered (DES 1993, 96). One inference from that discovery is that the eastern limit of the burgh was in the region of Market Street which suggests that traces of late medieval or post-medieval suburban occupation might well survive around Queen's Close. Watching briefs undertaken by Scotia Archaeology on New Wynd, a short distance to the north of the site, in 2004 and 2006 (DES 2004, 22; DES, 26) uncovered nothing of archaeological significance although a few sherds of medieval/post-medieval pottery were retrieved from another site on Queen's Close in 2007 (DES 2007, 33).

THE SITE

The house plot was located on the south side of Queen's Close, some 30m from its junction with Baltic Street. It was surrounded on all four sides by walls, those on its north and south sides being mortared rubble while those on its east and west were cement-rendered. Measuring 14.5m east/west by 7.5m wide, the house footprint extended to within 1m of the east and west walls and 2m of the south wall and was centred on NO 71562 57794. There was also a small extension, 2.5m by 1.5m, on its north side for an entrance porch to the house.

THE WATCHING BRIEF

Excavation was carried out using a mechanical excavator, the trench ranging in depth from 0.9m at its east end to 1.4m at its west. This enclosed area had been a small market garden until recent times with the result that the topsoil, which was 0.5-0.6m deep, consisted of dark brown, very humic loam with a high sand fraction derived from the underlying subsoil. There were numerous 20th-century artefacts within the topsoil, along with brick rubble, fragments of animal bone and lenses of ash, probably from domestic hearths.

Below the topsoil was almost stone-free, mid-brown, silty sand stained heavily from the overlying humic soil. The upper levels of the sand (approximately 0.2m) contained numerous flecks of charcoal and occasional fragments of animal bone although no artefacts were recovered from this level. There was no obvious division between this material and what is assumed to be undisturbed beach sand, the only indication being the absence of bone and the paucity of charcoal at lower levels.

Cutting through the sand, towards the east end of the trench, were several pits measuring typically 0.5m square all of which contained numerous modern objects such as bottles, ceramics and plastic sheeting as well as deposits of ash from coal fires. These were the only features uncovered below the topsoil, there being no trace of habitation predating the late 20th century.

CONCLUSIONS

The boundary of the medieval burgh was only a short distance away from this site and it would not have been surprising to find traces of suburban habitation or even remnants of the boundary itself within the excavation area. However, no features of archaeological significance were uncovered during the excavation although it is possible that the upper levels of sand containing animal bone fragments and charcoal represent leached topsoil from pre-modern times.

REFERENCES

Barrow, G W S 1960 *The Acts of Malcolm IV King of Scots 1153-1165*, Regestrum Regum Scotorum, 1. Edinburgh.

DES *Discovery & Excavation in Scotland*, Council for Scottish Archaeology. Edinburgh.

Gourlay, R & Turner, A 1978 *Historic Montrose: the archaeological implications of development*, Scottish Burgh Survey. Glasgow.

Pryde, G S 1965 *The Burghs of Scotland: a critical list*. Oxford.

PHOTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVE

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

- 1 The east end of the trench during excavation, viewed from the south
- 2-3 The trench during excavation, viewed from the east
- 4 The excavation nearing completion, viewed from the south-east
- 5 The excavation nearing completion, viewed from the south-west
- 6 The main trench fully excavated, viewed from the south-east
- 7 The main trench fully excavated, viewed from the south-west
- 8 The trench extension for the house porch, viewed from the east