

Scotia Archaeology

**REPORT
TO
MR BRIAN EASTON
AND
EKJN ARCHITECTS**

**24a HIGH STREET
LINLITHGOW**

**Watching brief
September-October 2010**

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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 single-storey office building at 24a High Street, Linlithgow, West Lothian. It will be built over the footprint of an earlier, single-storey building, since demolished, which served latterly as a coffee shop and probably as a wash house before that.

The archaeological work was carried out for EKJN Architects, acting on behalf of their client, Mr Brian Easton of Easton Dental Practice, Linlithgow. Mr Easton had been granted planning consent to erect the building subject to certain conditions (Planning Consent Reference number 06/0513/FUL) one of which was that a watching brief had to be undertaken during the development. This work was undertaken by Robin Murdoch of Scotia Archaeology between 22 September and 1 October 2010.

THE SITE

The site was located at NT 0043 7716, to the rear of 22-24 High Street, on the 'Linlithgow rigs' at the east end of the medieval burgh. Early maps were examined for clues as to the history, former use and disposition of structures in the vicinity of the site.

The earliest map, by Andrew & Mostyn Armstrong (published 1773), shows that the east end of the High Street had been laid out by that date. John Wood's plan of Linlithgow (1820) seems reasonably accurate in its depiction of the buildings fronting the street whereas the arrangement of structures to the rear (north) of these properties is less clear although a large, rectangular structure appears to abut the rear of 22-24 High Street.

The most accurate of the early maps is the first edition large scale Ordnance Survey (OS) map of Linlithgow (sheets 2 & 4), surveyed 1856, which shows a small, L-shaped structure to the north of the main building fronting the High Street. Its south end was detached from the main building by approximately 4m and appears to have abutted the west boundary wall of the property. According to the OS map, 22-24 High Street housed The Blue Bell Inn in the mid-19th century.

PREVIOUS WORK

In 2004, Headland Archaeology Limited undertook a standing building survey prior to the conversion of 22b High Street into flats, together with a watching brief during the excavation of service trenches associated with that development. It was established that the building (and presumably most others at this end of the High Street) dates from the late 18th or early 19th century. It was also found that the ground level in that area had been raised in recent years and that no features of archaeological significance were uncovered during the project (DES 2004, 131).

However, the site at 24a High Street does lie at the edge of the medieval burgh, where important archaeological finds might be expected, and a watching brief was required on this occasion.

THE WATCHING BRIEF

Access to the site was from the High Street, through a narrow close and down a short flight of steps. Spoil from the excavation had to be barrowed through the close to a skip on the High Street although some spoil was retained in order to backfill parts of the site once the development had been completed. At the start of the project, the site was covered with recently-deposited debris which was over 1m deep against the west boundary wall of the property. Much of this material was removed before the archaeological team commenced work.

The area of excavation measured approximately 8m north/south by 4.5m wide and was bounded on its west by the boundary wall of the property. It was cleared to a level, 0.15-0.20m below the paving that is contiguous with the steps leading up to the close. Thereafter, the foundation trenches for the new building were dug around the perimeter of the area, these trenches being 0.6m wide and up to 1m deep.

Excavation revealed the stumps of the north and south walls of a demolished building (Structure 1) measuring 4.4m north/south over walls 0.4m thick that were bonded with lime mortar. Both walls abutted the extant west boundary wall which presumably functioned as the west wall of Structure 1. The building's concrete floor overlay roughly set cobbles and brick fragments which gave onto demolition debris of sandstone rubble, brick and mortar.

Structure 1 had undergone many alterations, some of them evident in the west boundary wall. At some stage, a flue had been cut into its east face and a window slapped through it although this opening had been blocked at a later date. In addition, a toilet cubicle had been built against the north-west corner of the building.

A short stretch of another wall was exposed towards the south end of the east trench. Its relationship with Structure 1 is not clear although the masonry of this wall was cement-bonded whereas those of Structure 1 were bonded with lime mortar.

In the south-east corner of the site were numerous roof slates which appeared to have been stacked, perhaps for later retrieval but never collected. In the south-west corner the debris comprised mainly worked sandstone, including lintels and quoins, clearly derived from a demolished building of apparent good quality. That building (Structure 2) was defined on its north by a 0.7m-wide, mortar-bonded sandstone wall with traces of lime render on its inside face. The remains of this wall, whose north face was exposed in the north trench, provided the foundations of the north wall of Structure 1. Similarly, the demolished west wall of Structure 2 acted as a base for the extant west boundary wall. The walls of Structure 2 appeared to be built on buried topsoil although there was no opportunity to investigate this material further.

There was no evidence of an eastward return from the west wall of Structure 2 and no trace of the building's east wall. Below the rubble that covered the entire site was a spread of yellow clay, evidently the floor of Structure 2. Its upper surface was stained grey, probably by ash.

FINDS

Very few artefacts were retrieved from the excavation which is perhaps surprising for a site located so near the centre of the medieval burgh. All were found in unstratified contexts. Artefacts dating from the late 19th century and later were not retained.

- 1 Stone cannonball measuring approximately 100m in diameter
- 2 Small body sherd of transfer printed ware
- 3 Small body sherd of brown stoneware
- 4 Large body sherd of 16th/17th century, green/brown glaze pottery with a smooth dark grey fabric
- 5 Small sherd of potash-fluxed window glass, probably dating to before the late 17th century.

CONCLUSIONS

The earliest remains on the site appear to be those of Structure 2 of which only sparse remnants of its north and west walls and its clay floor survived. It would be reasonable to assume that the sandstone rubble lying below the concrete floor of Structure 1 was debris from the demolition of this building. It has proved impossible to date Structure 2 although it appears to have been a relatively substantial structure, perhaps dating to the 18th century.

REFERENCE

DES *Discovery & Excavation in Scotland*, Archaeology Scotland. Edinburgh.

PHOTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVE

The photographs listed below are contained within the project archive and are not reproduced within this report.

- 1-4 The west boundary wall, viewed from the east
- 5 The toilet, viewed from the south
- 6 General view of the site during the excavation, viewed from the south-east
- 7 Structure 1, viewed from the south
- 8 The concrete floor of Structure 1 being lifted, viewed from the south
- 9 Stone cannonball
- 10 The remains of the north wall of Structure 2 overlying remnants of the north wall of Structure 1, viewed from the south
- 11 The junction of the north and west walls of Structure 2, viewed from the south
- 12 The junction of the north and west walls of Structure 2, viewed from the north
- 13 The junction of the north and west walls of Structure 2, viewed from the east
- 14 The retaining wall at the east end of the site, viewed from the west
- 15 The west boundary wall overlying the west wall of Structure 2, viewed from the north
- 16 The south foundation trench during excavation, viewed from the east
- 17 The east foundation trench, viewed from the south