

Site **Melrose Abbey, Cloisters Road**

NGR NT 549 342

Project Description

Recording was undertaken of a trench dug by hand for an electricity cable at the E end of the Cloisters road. This area is external to the main abbey buildings but lies within the abbey precinct. The trench was irregular, and measured 60cm deep by 30-40cm wide and 28m long.

Report

At the W end, at least 3 layers of a metalled surface overlay dumped/demolition debris, which in turn overlay 2 structures of stone and clay, lying parallel to each other and running N-S. These were 1.7 and 4.5m wide respectively, and as they were only partially exposed, they present some problems of interpretation. At the E end of the trench a well and its apparent demolition material was overlain by a cobbled surface, itself superseded by a concrete surface. The well comprised two different builds; a clay bonded lower course and a mortar bonded upper. It ran approximately E-W, with a possible corner at its end, where the wall turns to run S. This wall appeared to be cut into further archaeological deposits. Finds (unstratified) included unglazed tile fragments, 18th- to 19th-century pottery, bone and oyster, and a copper-alloy handle/tap.

Interpretation

The size of the excavated area makes interpretation difficult, as does the lack of dateable finds and secure contexts. More recent activity is represented by pipe trenches, along with the metalled surfaces, be they cobbled or concrete. These overlay probable demolition/dump deposits, which in turn overlay structural remains. The find at the E end is probably part of a building, but the date and function remains unknown. This structure itself truncated earlier deposits. At the W end of the trench, things are even less clear. The clay and stone features may be drain capping for the Great Abbey Drain, road surfaces or walling. A combined function is also possible.

In summary the watching brief confirmed the existence of extensive archaeological deposits within the area, with the earliest deposits extending beyond the limits of the area opened.

Maps consulted

James Wood's map of Melrose 1826 - trackway shown running N to mill lead, and cluster of buildings shown around brewery and manse.

1st edn. OS map 1859 - trackway evident to the N. Southern road, along which the trench lay, was blocked by buildings.

OS 1898 - No trackway to the N, now blocked by 'St Kierans Cottage'. Still a concentration of buildings around the brewery, but on different alignments. Cloisters Road named as 'Abbey Place'.

OS 1921 - Identical to 1898, except road now called Cloisters Road.

OS 1962 - Modern layout now shown.

Finds (all unstratified)

Metals 1 Cu alloy handle/tap

Bone 1 Oyster shell

 2 bone frags. - 1 has butchery marks

Ceramics 5 frags. of tile, all unglazed; 1 has mortar adhering

 1 rim of ceramic pipe

 2 sherds unglazed pot

 2 sherds salt-glaze

 3 sherds internally glazed (brown/black) pot

 1 sherd dark brown external glazed pot

 1 sherd white glaze

 2 unidentifiable frags.

Contexts

001 Modern concrete surface

002 Cobbled road/yard

003 Demolition rubble

004 as 003

005 Mortar-bonded wall

006 Clay-bonded wall

007 Silty clay layer

008 as 007

009 Deposit of stone and silty clay

010 Dark grey silt deposit

- 011 Clay-bonded stone structure. Drain/roadway?
- 012 Loose silt layer
- 013 Clay-bonded stone structure, similar to 011
- 014 Cobbled road/yard
- 015 Compact fine silt make-up for 014
- 016 Very loose fine silt
- 017 Mortar and silt demolition

Illustrations