

Site Glasgow Cathedral

N.G.R NS 6025 6557

Project Description Watching Brief

A watching brief was maintained to monitor the excavation of service trenches for temporary office accommodation, over 20-22nd August 1996 (+ 26th August).

Report

The trenches lay on the northern side of the road running along the north side of the cathedral. The services comprised primarily a series of narrow trenches (average width 30cm) running initially parallel to the north edge of the road from a point opposite the north door to the vestry (presently Historic Scotland offices). Prior to the programme described below, the south wall of a complex cemetery layout had been breached, located to the north of the cathedral, in a state of dilapidation. The boundary wall was breached in order to allow access for vehicles, as well as services down to the compound of temporary buildings lying at the extreme eastern end of the graveyard/cemetery area. The cemetery itself comprised a series of north-south aligned walls, in an almost terraced configuration, demarcating a series of discrete burial areas. The enclosure walls and terraces showed signs of 19th-century inhumations, with elaborate headstones and grave markers being built against the walls themselves. There was an access route for the cemetery running east-west at the south end of the enclosure, into which the present access route opened. Original access was towards the western end of the enclosure. The roads themselves were intended to take vehicular traffic, and were consequently of substantial construction, and entered each terrace from the main south route, indicating areas for burial around the edges of each terrace. It was hoped that the service trenches could:

- a) be dug to the required depth without disturbing *in situ* burials and
- b) avoid any obvious areas of 19th-century inhumation (i.e. the route avoided graves wherever visible)

The route of the services comprised six areas of excavation in total.

Trench 1 ran from the western extremity of the track over a distance of 19.6m to a junction box site/manhole, where the route turned north-eastwards for a distance of 20.5m (Trench 2). Trench 3 was the cut between the north wall of the vestry and the west end of trench 1, a distance of 5.5m, cut across the cobbled road defining the north side of the cathedral. Trench 4 was a rectangular cut measuring 0.75 x 0.9m east-west by north-south respectively, located outside the north transept of the cathedral, with trench 5 running northwards from this to a point immediately within the south boundary wall of the 19th-century cemetery, a distance of c. 3m.

TRENCH 1

Trench 1 was dug through topsoil and disturbed earth (F101) for its entire length to the required depth (c. 35cm). Some 30 human bone fragments were retrieved within trenches 1, 3 and 4, but only 1 burial *in situ* was revealed (in trench 1 F102). This burial was located but not disturbed, aligned east-west, its west end lying some 5m east of the west end of trench 1.

TRENCH 2

An undisturbed burial (F201) was revealed lying 2m north of the junction between trenches 1 and 2, and was left undisturbed. Where trench 2 entered the cemetery enclosure, clear evidence was found for the cemetery south road, in the form of a series of dumped and consolidated layers of clay and rubble with metalling (F202).

TRENCH 3

Trench 3 was dug through cobbles and concrete underpinning, and showed signs of the ground having been much disturbed by previous service pipes. These features proved to be problematic for the insertion of new services, and had obliterated much of the archaeology present in the vicinity of the north cathedral road.

TRENCH 4

Trench 4 was located approx. 2.3m north of the north wall of the north transept, and was dug to a depth of 84cm. The entire fill of this trench comprised redeposited and disturbed black earth, with occasional disarticulated human remains, belying the proximity of 18th-century grave plots immediately to the north of the trench. An alignment of sandstone pitched stones was uncovered towards the southern edge of the trench aligned east-west and apparently representing evidence of a stone-lined grave which was not disturbed (F402).

TRENCH 5

Trench 5 ran from the north edge of trench 4 for a distance of 1.8m, at a depth of 82cm, to meet the south face of the south cemetery boundary wall, without hitting any *in situ* burials. On the north side of the south boundary wall, the trench was located to run between two burial plots, the latter being defined by a 'table-top' stone box immediately in front (north of) grave markers built against the north face of the boundary wall. This resulted in a trench 25cm wide extending for 1.1m in length.

TRENCH 6

Trench 6 was a curving cutting through topsoil, running to the south-west of the west end of trench 1, along the north edge of the north cathedral road.

TRENCH 7

A further trench was dug (Trench 7), extending the foundation trenches already dug by Glasgow City Council for the proposed temporary structures, as the latter were in the wrong place. The damage to the grave plots extending from the east enclosure wall, and the relevant

east face of the terrace wall by Glasgow City Council trenches indicated the presence of the stone boxes, which were in turn avoided by the new cutting. This trench formed the north foundation cutting for the new buildings, and extended over 13.5m east-west, with a depth of 50cm and a similar width. Other than dark humic soil throughout, the only feature of note was the cemetery road, which ran through the middle of the east terrace in the cemetery (F701).

Interpretation

It is clear that much of the area immediately to the north of the cathedral itself has been truncated by modern services. Only the stone-lined grave in trench 4 showed evidence for potentially medieval burials, and it is highly likely that the steep slope presently landscaped by the north cathedral road was more terraced in character, perhaps comparable to the terraced cemetery to the north, and doubtless reflecting access points in the north façade of the cathedral itself. It may be therefore that the potential for structures and burials is dictated more by the profile of the natural hill, which has in turn been heavily landscaped, than by any surface indications. It is noteworthy that the south boundary wall of the cemetery is in itself two-phased, with its southern face betraying a clear stepped profile, apparently the product of a sequential building programme commensurate with each successive burial. These burials are in turn 18th-century in date, and may have begun the tradition of burial plots at the foot of the long walls, a tradition which was extended in the 19th-century cemetery to the immediate north. It is likely that the burials uncovered in trenches 1 and 2 were 18th-century in date, and were themselves cut into an artificial or landscaped natural profile. The graveyard within which the proposed temporary buildings are to be located is in a poor state of preservation, and contains many fine funerary monuments, as indeed does to 18th-century 'range' forming the south side of the enclosure. It is clear that the burials on the north side of the cathedral followed a progression, taking up prescribed space associated with the medieval cathedral complex during the post-medieval period. The impression when viewed alongside the great 19th-century hospital encircling the graveyard is one of rather stark visions of mortality, with the hospital lying immediately adjacent to the cemetery. The combination of cathedral, burial ground and great municipal works makes this area one of extreme interest, speaking volumes about Victorian Glasgow. Whatever the case, it deserves a reasonable level of recording and maintenance.

In addition, there is interesting and badly eroding graffiti of 17th- and 18th-century date cut into the cathedral wall in the area of trench 4, which should be recorded prior to consolidation works above.

Finds

All disarticulated human remains were reinterred, after consultation with Historic Scotland, and no other finds were retained.

Contexts

Context	Description
F101	Dark humic soil, merging with turf and topsoil - generally loose, stone-free. Potentially 18th-century landscaping deposit
F102	Burial - coffin type, 18th-century
F201	Burial - coffin type, 18th-century
F202	19th-century cemetery road
F401	Mixed earth and small stone deposit, 18th-century landscaping
F402	Stone alignment forming north side of grave, non-coffin type (medieval?)
F501	19th-century table-top/box grave plot - family name 'Tennant'
F502	19th-century table-top/box grave plot - family name not visible
F701	19th-century cemetery road, joining with F202