

**Site** : Dundrennan Abbey

**NGR** : NX 7492 4750

**Project Description** : Archaeological Excavations & Clearance

### **Report**

Following the removal of the boundary wall between the previously public area of the monument and the excavations in the old stable yard to the S, Kirkdale Archaeology was engaged by Historic Scotland in early July 1997 to supervise and conduct the removal of material so as to allow visitor access between the two areas. While the public access area had previously been grassed, with the exception of a gravel surface on the Cloister walk, current policy is to use gravel to denote interior and grass for external areas. The Historic Scotland squad were required therefore to remove the existing turf within the Parlour and the N end of the Novice's Day Room (Room 4).

In addition it was necessary to reduce slightly the levels left within Rooms 1 and 2 (subdivisions within the Warming Room) which were archaeologically sensitive, and to rationalise deposits against the S and SE limits of Room 4 to allow final consolidation of masonry and laying of gravel. The area between the external S face of Room 4 and the N wall of the stable yard was similarly terraced to create visitor access to a chute into the Great Drain and to formalise the S edge of the drain channel where it had been robbed away in the creation of the stable yard.

### ***ROOMS 1 & 2***

Within Room 1 a strip between drain 022 and N-S wall 003 was reduced by up to 15cm, largely to allow a column base (029) which is overlain by 003 to be visible through the proposed gravel surface. Some 4cm of weathered soil (309) which probably represents the surface of 028 as left in 1991 was removed as a cleaning exercise. The material below this (310), a mixed, sandy silt, matches the description of 028 and is probably the same context. This proved to run beneath 003 and produced a quantity of bone, some wall plaster and two sherds of pottery. The presence of wall plaster is likely to indicate a period of dilapidation prior to the construction of 003. Below this, a cleaner orange sandy clay (311) appeared to be derived from the natural material observed during earlier excavations, and at least in part overlay early wall footings 050, the S face of which was exposed to show it to run below 003.

The S half of Room 2 was reduced by the same amount to create a raised face to the rear of 021, a window or door within E-W wall 005. Although much weathered, the deposits recorded at the end of excavation in 1991 were still recognisable. This comprised a small area of collapse from 003 (038) which produced only a few fragments of bone and three very small sherds of pottery. Again this proved to run below the base of 003, but it was clearly not the same material as 028/310. However a possible surface (019) identified in 1991 appeared not unlike the former and may well have been removed in a weathered state along with 039 on this

occasion. The underlying material (041) equated with 311 and on its E limits appeared to have been cut by a possible drain channel (305) which lay below N-S wall 011 and appeared to be truncated by the N face of 021. This would seem to indicate a drainage feature pre-dating the layout of the warming room based on walls 004 and 005. A small patch of possible metalling (306) and an intrusion (307) into 041 were exposed and recorded, but remained unexcavated.

Although the wall line 050 was not exposed in Room 2 at the level achieved, it was noted that the S end of 003, where it abutted 021 was founded in a deeper cut against 041 which may relate to a drop in levels over the earlier wall line.

#### ***ROOM 4***

This was the only element within the S Range which had been bisected by the boundary wall, so that the variance in levels from the N to S ends was more extreme. At the end of excavation in 1992, the S end of the room was left with a clay and rubble bank (114) against the inner face of walls 080 and 002; it was felt that a stretch of well built but consolidated scarcement along the base of the W wall, together with an apparently stony bank below turf along the inner face of the N wall within the public access area might be a continuation of this feature. The requirement was to remove the clay banking either to a level or a medium which could be consolidated, and to rationalise an associated threshold (113) through the door (013) in wall 002. If the bank to the N proved to be similar after removal of turf it was to be treated in the same way.

In the event the bank proved to be a consolidated stone-built drain (313) now exposed above what must have been its original operational level. Levelling material below the turf, a topsoil-rich shell sand (312) was found to contain numerous fragments of glass, china (including sponge ware and willow pattern) and earthenware entirely similar to the material recovered from modern contexts during excavations between 1991 and 1994. The drain was itself built directly against the inner face of the N wall which does not run square to the room, but instead swings away to the NE; its consolidated remains are unfaced on this side. The implication is that 313 was cut against a partially ruinous structure.

As part of this same exercise, the base of a column (314), one of a pair also represented by 083 excavated in 1992, was exposed and investigated. The basal drum was found to be seated on a bed of hard, pebbly, pale yellow mortar (not unlike apparent column bases excavated at Melrose Abbey in 1996) surrounded by and apparently integral to an area c2.0m x 1.7m of paving. The modern infill (312) was seen to run beneath these, indicating that the pillar had been reset at the time of consolidation. Additionally it was noted that the bottom of the basal drum, where it joined the mortar, had apparently been broken off. Whether this was a result of damage in antiquity or more recent activity is not clear, but the feature was shown not to lie in its original position.

The level of the paving was some 20cm lower than the associated, apparently undisturbed surface (111) for 083, which may cause some problems in its making-up for display purposes. Equally it was found that the level of archaeological deposits as left in the recently excavated area is in the region of 30cm higher than the undisturbed horizon below modern infill 312.

In the area excavated in 1992, the doorway 013 was cleared of a 10cm deep deposit of slate fragments in a sandy silty clay (315) which was bounded by the threshold face (113) to the E and ran below 064, an inserted door stop of three re-used architectural fragments which related to the surface remaining in Room 3 to the W. A few fragments of bone were recovered from this. Below this, a level surface of yellow clay (316) with two laid slabs to the W which may represent an original doorway surface, bonded into the rear of 113 appeared to run below the jambs of 013. This was left as a base for the required surface.

The clay and rubble bank 114 was found to overlie the S end of 113 at which point a shallow depression (317) filled with loose rooted silt represented the socket of a stone removed from 113 which was to be replaced in consolidation. A single iron object, and two fragments of bone were retrieved from this deposit.

At the SE corner and along the face of the E wall, 114 was removed to a firmer base of grey and yellow clay with sections of well built stone facing (318). It appeared that 114 overlies the mortar-rich surface 093 which formed the limit of the 1992 excavations. However the bank itself was not particularly stable and the effects of five years of weathering plus disturbance during consolidation may well have caused slumping to the N. There was no difference in finds material between the two contexts, and the relationship cannot be said to be secure. Finds retrieved from 114 included window glass, wall plaster, pottery and bone, while 093 produced a considerable quantity of wall plaster (including a fragment which had been worked into a small disc, implying activity during a period of dilapidation), bone, metalwork and a single sherd of pottery. Both contexts therefore appeared to represent accumulations during the decay of the internal fabric.

093 was not completely removed but merely reduced to a sufficient extent as to provide a relatively level surface against the face of 318. At the SE corner of the room it was found to overlie tan organic soil deposit (320) producing pottery and bone from its surface. This was not excavated as the required level was achieved at this point. In the SE corner, overlying and partly infilling voids within 318, ashy deposit 319 produced fragments of window glass and lead came. At the SE angle of 318 the stones appeared burnt, and may therefore be associated with a temporary hearth inserted at this point.

The clay-bonded scarcement, like feature 318, was seen to be an integral part of threshold 113. At the SE angle of the room it clearly abutted the face of wall 080 and the face below window 081. However an inserted jamb on the W of 081 was clearly founded on the surface of 318 (it may even have lain on 114 but consolidation has destroyed this relationship) and it appeared that this also ran below the W continuation of 080. Since it also appeared that 002

was built on this level at the SE and the door 013 was founded on the clay bonding of 113, the implication is that the internal SE corner of Room 4 is a rebuild. 318 itself may represent a broad clay-bonded foundation level.

### *THE PARLOUR*

Immediately below the turf an E-W alignment of slabs, partly sealed by and set within 312 type material was exposed. This was cleared to define the feature which proved to be the caps of a drain (321) running through the W door from the Cloister to the E wall of the room. Some 2m E of the outer face of the E wall, slabs were noted protruding through the grass of the graveyard, continuing the same alignment. It was felt that these were probably a part of 321 exposed in earlier clearance and that it was likely that drain 313 converged at this point. The capstones were photographed and recorded, but no other action was taken before they were reburied.

### *AREA S OF THE S RANGE*

Work in this area comprised defining the S edge of the uncapped element of the Great Drain and slightly reducing the ground level to the SW angle of the Reredorter. In the former area a N-S soil-filled feature (300) previously identified as a possible drain inlet (147) proved to be the modern infill of a cut (301) which is part of a disturbance including 099, interpreted as one of a series of early 20th-century trenches cut along the line of the drain. This fill produced seven fragments of spongeware. Below this a mass of clay-bonded rubble (302) stretching over 5m E-W defined the edge of the drain channel (this was previously identified as two separate contexts, 108 and 118). The E limit of this feature appeared as a built face abutting the S edge of drain arch 103 and retaining deposit 224 to the E. The W end had probably been removed by robbing cut 109.

Adjacent to surviving drain base slabs 107, a band of horizontally laid small slabs (308) formed a discrete band between the former and the N face of 302. This was interpreted as a basal course for a now robbed stone-built drain side. No further excavation was carried out. It is felt that 302 and a clay and rubble face abutting the S side of wall 080 (removed to allow consolidation in 1994) are probably contemporary, and may relate to the Room 4 refurbishment (318). It is also clear that the Great Drain at this point was created by the raising of the natural level, and is probably not a primary feature.

The weathered surface of 224, the deposit against which drain capstones 125 were inserted, was cleaned, producing a few fragments of bone and a stone pot lid (context 303). At the end of excavation in 1994 the gutter (089) which leads to a garderobe pit in the Great Drain was left on a plinth of material (091). Although 089 is to be retained in the displayed area, it was thought that 091 could be further reduced to create a more viable step for access to chute 090. This material produced a large quantity of animal bone and a few objects of metalwork.

Below this, and set into 224, four capstones of a NW-SE aligned drain (304) were revealed. The south easternmost of these comprised a re-used architectural sandstone, the remainder comprising rough-dressed sandstone blocks. To the NW this had been truncated by the edge created to receive 125, while to the SE it had been removed by the cut for the stable yard wall (071). A void at this point indicated that the surviving channel was largely unsilted. The feature related to a blocking (288) noted in the S wall of the Great Drain (290) during clearance of the channel in 1994. It clearly predated the final capping of the drain with 125, but post-dated the original construction of buttress 087, which represented the corner of the Reredorter. This could have functioned at a higher level than the present stable yard, indicating a fairly severe truncation within this area.

### **Interpretation**

Although the level of excavation carried out was minimal it has served to show both the probable survival of archaeological deposits at shallow depth in the old public access area, and the further complexity of the structures comprising the S Range.

Although no new information was recovered in Rooms 1 and 2, other than that wall 003 was probably late in date, the evidence from Room 004 indicated a number of phases. While most of the external face of wall 080 was seen to be of a single build, the internal face exhibited four main phases:-

Phase 1 : The SE angle is integral to 079 and 082 (the W wall and the arch in Room 5 respectively) and the W side of window 081 is part of this build.

Phase 2 : A scarcement or footing of clay-bonded stone (318) abuts the SE angle but underlies a rebuilt W side to 081 and runs below the W end of 080. At the same time 113 is constructed, along with a clay pad 316 below the line of 002. 130 is probably contemporary with this, and represents a remodelling of the Great Drain together with 302. The area of 130 corresponds to the point at which the external face of 080 becomes absent.

Phase 3 : The W end of 080 is constructed together with wall 002 and door 013. Buttress 058, which is arguably of a generation with the other, notionally primary external buttresses, appears to be absorbed by the angle of 002 and 080.

Phase 4 : The bank 114 is raised and it is likely that drain 313 is contemporary. It is now difficult to see 114 as a scarcement for a sprung floor, although the drain does indicate a surface concomitant with this. The rebuilt window 081 may be blocked at this stage.

It should be noted that no formal floor levels have been located in any of the excavated deposits, and that all of the material removed is indicative of the products of decay and possible abandonment.

A survey of the Maitland Property by Sheridan (1841) shows both pillars now visible within the room, together with the now demolished boundary wall. However, only the façade of the chapter house is indicated and no ground plan of either the parlour or Room 4 is given. It was originally assumed that pillar 083 had been excavated by the Commissioners of Woods and Forests in the 19th century, but it seems now more likely that it may have merely been located during construction of the wall. Certainly the infilling and consolidation of the N half of Room 4 seems more likely to date to the 20th century.

Of equal interest on the same survey is the presence of a range of buildings running E-W in the SE angle of the cloister. It is felt that these may be a post-Reformation survival, associated with drains 313 and 321.

The final level achieved within Room 4 still remains somewhat problematical, because of the depth to which the N end had previously been excavated. Since this is the only part of the range which runs across two distinct periods of occupation, it may be worth reducing the area to a common level at some point in the future.

### **Contexts**

<b>Context No.</b>	<b>Description</b>
300	Fill of modern intrusion = 147 and 099
301	Cut for 300 = 119
302	Clay-bonded rubble revetment = 108 + 118
303	Weathered surface of 224
304	Drain caps - surviving element of drain blocked by 288
305	Drain caps and fill in Room 2
306	Possible metallised surface on 041 in Room 2
307	Loose stony spread, apparent disturbance against 041
308	Base for S side of Great Drain
309	Cleaned surface of 028 in Room 1
310	Part of 028, runs below 039 in Room 1
311	Surface as left after removal of 310 in Room 1, may still be 028
312	Modern backfill forming base for turf in Room 4
313	Consolidated drain channel in Room 4
314	Mortar and slab base for re-erected column in Room 4
315	Surface in doorway through 002 in Room 4
316	Clay surface below 315, revetted by 113 in Room 4
317	Stone hole in 316 in Room 4
318	Clay-bonded (?) wall footings below 114 in Room 4
319	Ashy deposit ?within 318 in SW of Room 4
320	Organic deposit below 093 in SE of Room 4
321	Drain cover slabs in the Parlour

## **Finds**

### ***CERAMICS***

<b>Context No.</b>	<b>Description</b>
039	3 small sherds of unglazed ceramic
093	1 sherd ceramic
114	3 sherds ceramic
	2 tile frags.
300	7 sherds spongeware
310	2 sherds ceramic
319	4 tile frags.
320	3 sherds ceramic

### ***METALWORK***

<b>Context No.</b>	<b>Description</b>
091	1 Cu Alloy lace tag
	3 Fe objects
093	2 Fe nails
	1 Cu Alloy pin
U/S over 108	1 Cu Alloy lace tag
114	3 Fe objects
317	1 Fe object
319	3 fragments of Pb came

### ***ANIMAL BONE & SHELL***

<b>Context No.</b>	<b>Description</b>
039	6 fragments bone
091	>100 assorted bone frags.
	1 Oyster shell
	3 Whelk shells
093	44 bone frags.
	9 shells and frags. thereof
114	>100 bone frags.
	7 shell frags.
300	10 bone frags.
303	9 bone frags.
309	19 bone frags.
	3 shell frags.
310	c.50 bone frags.
	3 shell frags.
315	18 bone frags.
317	2 bone frags.
320	26 bone frags.
	1 shell frag.

*SLATE, STONE & OTHER BUILDING MATERIALS*

<b>Context No.</b>	<b>Description</b>
091	1 roof slate
093	Numerous frags. of wall plaster
	1 plaster disc (?counter/?pot-lid)
114	46 frags. wall plaster
303	1 stone pot-lid
309	1 frag. plaster
310	8 frags. plaster

*WINDOW GLASS*

<b>Context No.</b>	<b>Description</b>
319	12 sherds of window glass

*OTHER FINDS*

<b>Context No.</b>	<b>Description</b>
310	7 charcoal frags.

**Photographs**

*COLOUR SLIDE FILM #1*

<b>Frame No.</b>	<b>Subject</b>	<b>From</b>
12-13	Warming Room, E side, after cleaning	N
14-15	300 cut back as a rough section from the previous edge	N
16	Warming Room, E side, after required spit removed	N
17	Detail of reused column base/threshold 029/040	W
18	Detail of S face of rest of wall 050 uncovered	W
19-22	Capped E-W drain in Parlour	W,E
23-24	Drain running E below E end of Parlour	W
25-28	Room 4 founds for N pillar	W,E
29-32	Room 4 drain along N side	W,E
33-34	Room 4 E end of drain along N end & poss.caps outside to NE	W
35	Room 4 W end of drain on N side as it enters room, and possible buttress/step/later floor support ledge next to it.	E
36	Plough-scarred stone used as drain cap, Room 4, N side	S

**MONO PRINT FILM #1**

<b>Frame No.</b>	<b>Subject</b>	<b>From</b>
1-2	Warming Room, E side, after cleaning	N
3-4	300 cut back as a rough section from the previous edge	N
5	Warming Room, E side, after required spit removed	N
6	Detail of reused column base/threshold 029/040	W
7	Detail of S face of rest of wall 050 uncovered	W
8-11	Capped E-W drain in Parlour	W,E
12-13	Drain running E below E end of Parlour	W
14-17	Room 4 founds for N pillar	W,E
18-21	Room 4 drain along N side	W,E
22-23	Room 4 E end of drain along N end & poss.caps outside to NE	W
24	Room 4 W end of drain on N side as it enters room, and possible buttress/step/later floor support ledge next to it.	E
25	Plough-scarred stone used as drain cap, Room 4, N side	S
26-29	302 revetment	W,E
30-31	Drain caps 304 & surface 224	S
32-33	Threshold at S end of W wall, Room 4	E
34-35	Room 2 condition before reduction of level	N
36	Room 2 S end as left	N

**COLOUR SLIDE FILM #2**

<b>Frame No.</b>	<b>Subject</b>	<b>From</b>
1-4	302 revetment	W,E
5-6	Drain caps 304 & surface 224	S
7-8	Threshold at S end of W wall, Room 4	E
9-10	Room 2 condition before reduction of level	N
11-12	Room 2 S end as left	N
13-16	Stone heap and scarcement face against S wall Room 4	E,W
17-18	Threshold in SW corner of Room 4	E
19-20	S wall of Room 4	NW
21-22	SW corner of Room 4	NW
23-36	General views of abbey after the removal of the boundary wall	All

**MONO PRINT FILM #2**

<b>Frame No.</b>	<b>Subject</b>	<b>From</b>
1	Detail of drain elements 305 in Room 2	-
2-5	Stone heap and scarcement face against S wall Room 4	E,W
6-7	Threshold in SW corner of Room 4	E
8-9	S wall of Room 4	NW
10-11	SW corner of Room 4	NW