

Site : Elgin Cathedral

NGR : NJ 2218 6305

Project Description : Archaeological Watching Brief

Report

On the Monday the 14th of July 1997 a short watching brief was carried out by Kirkdale Archaeology in the area immediately south of the Bishops House. The groundworks were carried out by Moray District Council and involved two trenches being dug by machine and then cleaned by hand. The trenches were numbered 1 and 2.

TRENCH 1

Trench 1 was located approximately 1m south of the southernmost structure uncovered during earlier excavations in the SE part of the Bishops House (Fig. 1). It measured 55m N-S, was 1.40m wide and between 0.60m and 0.85m deep. The southern end of the trench was located against the northern gate-post at the entrance to the park.

In the northernmost part of the trench under the tarmac (001) there was a cut throughout the full depth of the trench. This feature (002) was the cut for a wall that was built very recently, probably in the late 1980s.

Situated 3m south of 002, 004 was a 'U' shaped cut 2.70m wide directly under the tarmac and over 0.75m deep. 004 contained a plastic-covered electricity cable and appeared to be the post-1988 re-routing of a cable. The fills of 004 were; a mixed loose deposit of stones and dark brown silty clay (009), sandwiched between loose yellow sand deposits 008 and 010. Both 002 and 003 cut deposit 005. The latter, a light brown sandy gravel, was found throughout the trench varying from 0.15m to 0.50m in depth. It was thought to be associated with the pavement, probably a base for it, and sealed 003.

Sealed by 005 in the northern 8m of the trench, 003 was a mixed deposit consisting of 60% pale grey mortar 30% small, 60mm on average, stones and 10% light grey silt. There was the remains of a cigarette packet recovered from this deposit showing it to be modern. 003 was thought likely to be demolition or construction debris deposited during one of the recent building phases in the area, or perhaps material dumped during recent excavation in the Bishops House.

In patches toward the bottom of the trench there was a deposit of orange brown sandy silt with occasional clay patches (006) up to 0.15m in depth, but this material was rarely fully excavated. It was thought that this material may be an old ground surface but there was too little of it seen to make a confident statement about it. 006 was sealed by 003 and overlay 007.

Also seen in patches throughout Trench 1, 007 was mid grey brown slightly silty sand with occasional charcoal flecks. This material had the appearance of a garden deposit but there

were only patches of it seen. 007 was the earliest deposit excavated but there were no finds from this or 006, making it impossible to assign them to any period.

TRENCH 2

Trench 2 measured 12m N-S and extended south from the southern entrance gate-post. It was 1.10m wide and up to 0.50m deep.

The deposits consisted of 0.10m of tarmac (001), over 0.20m-0.30m of make-up material (005) and 0.10m-0.20m of deposit (007). There were only occasional patches of 006 present.

SUMMARY

The majority of the features appear to date to the late 20th century and probably post-1988, including 001, 002, 003, 004, 005, 008, 009 and 010. There were sherds of 20th-century milk bottle glass (003 and 009) and a cigarette packet (003) noted in these deposits. These finds were not kept.

The lower and only partially seen deposits 006 and 007 were not dated but seemed different in character; less mixed, cleaner and more compact, and produced no finds. The clean nature of these deposits and the lack of 20th-century artefacts may suggest this deposit is of greater antiquity although it is impossible to assign a date to it. It was thought possible that 006 represented an earlier ground surface and 007 a garden soil dating to the same period.

FUTURE EXCAVATION

Any future groundworks in this area would require archaeological investigation if it was deep enough to remove 006 and 007. In this event the initial priority would be to recover some daring evidence from these and any other deposits removed. It would seem that if there was excavation in the area south of the Bishops House only a watching brief would be required, in the initial stage at least.

Drawing List

<u>No</u>	<u>Type</u>	<u>Scale</u>	<u>Feature Nos</u>	<u>Description</u>
1	Plan	1:50	None	Location of trenches
2	Section	1:50	001-010	East section of trench 1
3	Section	1:50	001, 003, 006+007	East section of trench 2

Photographs

There were ten black and white prints and ten colour prints taken. The photographs showed the trench locations and some detail of the features in the north end of the trench.

Finds

There were no finds retained.