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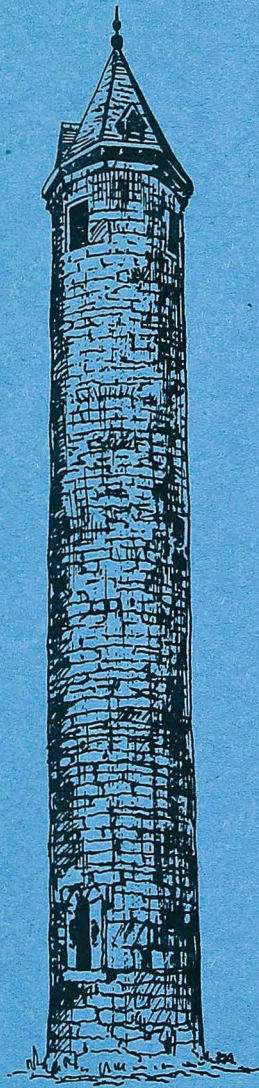# BRECHIN

the archaeological implications
of development

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Scottish Burgh Survey
1977

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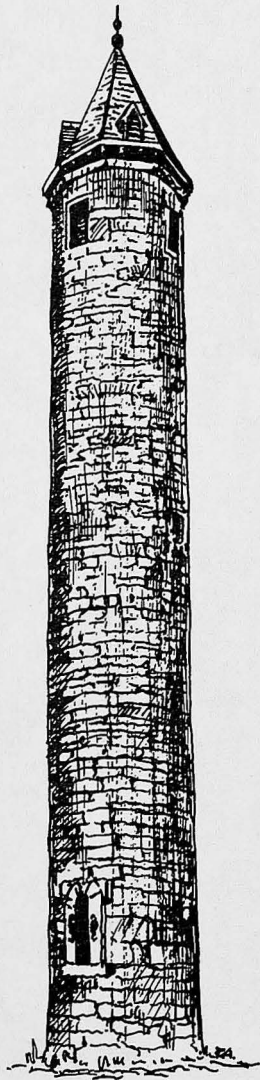
Robert Gourlay
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1977

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PREFACE

This report on the history and archaeology of the former burgh of Brechin is one of a series of such reports on the historic towns of Scotland. The reports have been commissioned by the Ancient Monuments division of the Department of the Environment with a view to providing the necessary background information upon which to base a policy for urban research in the future They are also aimed at providing local authority planning departments with the historical and archaeological information necessary to enable them to assess the archaeological implications of any planning applications.

Each report contains an historical report compiled by Anne Turner, with a short archaeological discussion and a series of illustrative plans compiled and drawn by Robert Gourlay. The reports attempt to identify those areas within the burghs which were developed at various periods of their history up to approximately 1800, and to locate within those areas sites which are of particular historical importance. Areas of nineteenth century growth and modern suburbs have not been examined.

The survey team would like to acknowledge the assistance of Professor Leslie Alcock and Mr. Eric Talbot who supervised the project at Glasgow University; Angus District Council Planning Department; the staff of Brechin Library; The Scottish Development Department, Historic Buildings Section; the staff of the Archaeology Division of the Ordnance Survey, Edinburgh; and Miss Lisbeth Thoms of Dundee Museum. A special mention should be made to Mr. D. B. Thoms of Brechin who read over the historical draft and added valuable comments.

Cover:- The eleventh-century round tower, Brechin.

History

'And what sort of a place is this Ancient City of Brechin?' said my friend. 'There
are various and conflicting opinions', I replied. 'Liberals belaud her as a strong-
hold of sound political principle; Conservatives denounce her as a hot-bed of rad-
icalism; compilers of school geographies commend her as a flourishing city, de-
voted to the manufacture of linen; and Socialist demagogues call down oratorical
fire and brimstone on her as the haunt of the detested capitalist. The average
citizen, despite an occasional grumble at the rates, is proud of the old place and
considers it very go-ahead for its size. '   ('Vatheck', 1894)

INTRODUCTION

Site: Brechin stands on the left bank of the River South Esk, some eight miles
(12km) upstream from Montrose and about thirteen miles (20km) north-east of For-
far.   Traditionally the town occupied the lowest bridging point on the river, a ford
which is overlooked by Brechin Castle, the residence of the Earls of Dalhousie.
The castle is separated from the burgh by the wooded gorge of Skinner's Burn.
Another burn, the Den, flows to the east of Brechin and marked the point where the
royalty ended.   A route leading from Laurencekirk and Aberdeen met the Cookston
Loan near the North Port.   Another road entered the town from the west, from the
direction of Haughmuir and Careston.   Traffic from Arbroath, Forfar and Dundee
crossed the Den Burn near the Meikle Mill and made its way up the Path Wynd to
the foot of the High Street (Thoms, 1977, 142).   The road from Montrose joined it
at this point.

Place Name: The place name Brechin is from an early Celtic personal name
Brychan.   The genitive Brec(h)ini occurs in the book of Deer, and Brechne in the
Pictish Chronicle (Nicolaisen, et al., 1970, 58).

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Burgh Status: Initially Brechin was concurrently a city and a market centre belong-
ing to a bishop.   It developed into a de facto royal burgh in the late fifteenth century
and became de iure by a 1641 Parliamentary ratification (Pryde, 1965, 33).   It was
represented in Parliament from 1479 and included in the stent of 1483.   Brechin was
formally admitted to the Convention of Royal Burghs in 1555 (Pryde, 1965, 33).

Medieval: The first mention of Brechin occurs in the tenth century in the Chronicle

of the Kings of Scotland which comes to an end with a reference to Kenneth II (971-995) hic est qui tribuit magnum civitatem Brechne Domino (Brech, Reg., 1856, i, iv). The translation of civitatem has led to some dispute amongst scholars. Anderson (ES, 1922, i, 512) translated the passage as 'it is he who consigned the great city of Brechin to the Lord'. The use of the classical Latin meaning of civitas in this passage wrongly conjures up the idea of a metropolis in tenth-century Angus. G.W. S. Barrow, on the other hand, in a discussion of the use cathir (Irish 'city', secondarily 'monastery') or caer (Welsh 'fortified centre') as terms precursing thanes and shires, observed that 'we might also imagine some word such as cathir behind the magna civitatis employed by the writer of the Chronicle of the Kings of Scotland, sub annis 971-995, to describe Brechin' (1973, 66). David Thoms has translated the phrase magnum civitatem as 'the great community' and supposed that Kenneth's 'gift to the Lord' may be interpreted as meaning that he endowed the Culdee community with more land or that it referred to the Round Tower (1977, 2). There is no mention of a town, toun or burgh of Brechin. As David Thoms himself observed, 'all that we have learned is that in the reign of Kenneth II there was a large community of secular priests established under the name Brechin, identified as a centre of the Christian faith' (1977, 2).

Nothing more is heard of Brechin for about two hundred years. A royal charter issued in 1165 x 1171 confirmed to the bishop and Culdees of Brechin the grant made to them by David I of a market in the toun (villa) of Brechin every Sunday, as freely as the Bishop of St. Andrews had his market (Barrow, 1971, 198). Thus at perhaps the same time as David I had raised Brechin into an episcopal see, he had granted a market to the bishop and Culdees and in that way he encouraged people from the landward parishes to buy and sell goods there. Brechin received its market charter possibly due to the increased revenues of the bishopric and survived as a market centre due to the cathedral (Thoms, 1977, 5). The 'market charter' in no way raised Brechin to the status of a burgh, either royal or episcopal.

Brechin was therefore an anomaly - it was a city, by virtue of the bishop's see, with the right to hold a weekly market by virtue of the royal grant, but it was not a burgh. A theme which dominated the history of medieval Brechin was the protection of that market privilege against the jealous burghs of Forfar, Montrose and Dundee. Constant vigilance on the part of the bishops was vital. In 1307 Robert I ordered the Sheriff of Forfar to desist from obstructing the citizens of Brechin in the exercise of their market rights and later in his reign, in 1321, he confirmed by charter the right of the bishops to hold their Sunday market. In 1352, however, a complaint was

upheld in a chamberlain ayre (circuit court of the king's chamberlain) at Montrose which prohibited anyone at Brechin 'from holding or promoting within the bounds of the royal burgh of Montrose a market for wool, hides, fleece or merchandise to the great or small customs' (Thoms, 1977, 7). The interdict seems to have been ignored until January 1364 when according to a document in Montrose burgh archives the sheriff of Forfar ordered the market cross to be cast down (Thoms, 1977, 7). The bishop countered this move and the matter was resolved in 1369 when David II confirmed the right of a market and allowed for all merchants resident in Brechin to have undisturbed passages on the Rivers Tay and South Esk (Black, 1839, 13). This charter was confirmed by David's successor, Robert II in 1372 (Black, 1839, 13), a year which also witnessed an agreement between Montrose and Forfar permitting their burgesses to enter each other's bounds and refusing admission to Brechiners (Thoms, 1977, 9).

By the 1480s the royal burghs had come to acknowledge Brechin as a de facto royal burgh, i.e., she enjoyed the same trading rights and accepted the same taxation obligations (Thoms, 1977, 19). An important step towards this acknowledgement came in 1451 when James II granted the bishop two charters. One merely confirmed what had been granted before: the right of a weekly market, the unrestricted use of two rivers to facilitate trading, its chamberlain courts and immunity from unauthorised interference (Thoms, 1977, 13). The second James II charter allowed for the erection of a market cross 'set up where convenient to the Bishop' and a tron for weighing wool, skin and hides (Thoms, 1977, 11). The crown had conferred upon Brechin, as it had upon other episcopal burghs, the same trading privilege and the same rights were held of the bishop. Another important step towards her acknowledgement as a de facto royal burgh came in 1483 when she participated in the taxation of burghs north of the Forth. Brechin's contribution to the stent of 1483 was £4, compared to £26 13s 4d for Dundee and £5 6s 8d for Montrose (RCRB, i, 543).

Early Modern : One local historian inferred that the silence of the records meant that the 'change in the religion of the state created little disturbance in the city of Brechin' (Black, 1839, 29). Although episcopacy was not finally abolished until 1689, the connection between Brechin and her bishops, who through the centuries had fought for her interests, became progressively weaker. Without the prestige of the bishop, Brechin was left to her own devices to grow and expand. Church, school and hospital fell into the control of burghal magistrates. Moreover, lands and a mill, formerly the property of the bishop, moved into the town's possession.

Sixteenth-century Brechin retained a humble position on the stent rolls. In 1535 she was taxed at a rate of £56 5s behind Dundee's £321 17s 6d and Montrose's £90 and ahead of Forfar's £16 17s 6d (RCRB, i, 514). A 1550 embassy sent to the Emperor result ed in Brechin paying a contribution of forty crowns, while Forfar paid twelve, Montrose sixty-four and Dundee three hundred and four (RCRB, i, 519). The stent of 1597 found Brechin still in a position behind Dundee and Montrose. Her contribution of 23s was exceeded by Montrose's 32s and Dundee's £10 15s (RCRB, ii, 10).

War and plague beset Brechin in the 1640s. Montrose and his army passed through Brechin several times between September 1644 and September 1645. On one occasion in 1644 the town was sacked and about sixty houses burned (Black, 1839, 57). Like-wise, in May 1647 a contingent of Argyll's troops were in Brechin. A month later plague broke out in the parish. Houses of the infected were ordered to be cleansed and the victims themselves were removed to wooden huts specially built for them in the Common Den running down from the Gallowhill to the Montrose Road (Thoms, 1977, 59).

A note in the Guildry papers relates the concern of Brechin merchants, in 1666, at their declining position: they complain that they 'are in a worse condition nor chap-men and merchants who live at Kirktowns in the country because they are not liable to public burdens as we are'. The yarn and linen trade was singled out for a special note as having become 'so false and untrue that trade will altogether ruin' (Thoms, 1966, 26). A slight decline in her position on the stent rolls was noted for 1670 when she was taxed at eleven shillings compared to the 1649 rate of twelve shillings (RCRB, iii, 332, 222). A disastrous fire struck Brechin in 1672, destroying dwelling-houses, barns and victuals. Charity relief for the burgh was raised in the surrounding par-ishes (Black, 1839, 78). However, one observer, John Ochterlony, writing in the 1680s, optimistically declared 'the town is tolerable well built and has a considerable trade by reason of their vicinity to Montrose'. Its weekly market, he observed, attracted a large number of Highland men 'with timber, peat and heather and an abundance of muir foul' (Thoms, 1977, 100).

Ochterlony's observations are not matched by the tone of the 1692 report which spoke of the poor state of their inland trade 'being altogether failed within these three or four years last, so that more than a third part of the merchants are either become bankrupt or else left the burgh as will appear by a list of the vacant houses' (RCRB, iv, 610). The goods traded included soap, salt, iron, pots and pans. The Market

Cross, tolbooth and school-house were all said to have been in a ruinous condition (RCRB, iv, 611). Brechin's position on the stent rolls continued to decline in the closing years of the century. Stented at eleven shillings in 1683, she was taxed at a rate of nine shillings in 1692 (RCRB, iv, 40, 160).

Eighteenth Century: The first half of the eighteenth century was troubled with the Jacobite rebellions and internal political rivalries. However, Brechin in the second half of the century settled down under the leadership of two highly gifted Provosts: John Molison and his son and namesake. It is to their credit especially that the town council undertook a modest programme of urban renewal. The ports were removed, streets tidied and widened, fore-stairs taken down. Moreover, the Tolbooth was at first refurbished and later, in 1789, rebuilt entirely. Industries including the manufacture of linen and yarn were prosperous and among the estimated 5000 souls of Brechin parish in 1793 were three surgeons, a number of merchants, shop-keepers, weavers, bakers, smiths and three writers (i.e., lawyers) resident in the town of Brechin (Sinclair, 1793, v, 460).

BURGH MORPHOLOGY

Street Layout: Brechin's development has been profoundly influenced by the neighbouring topography. The High Street for a long time rose steeply in short, irregular terraces from the South Port to the North Port (Thoms, 1977, 62). Halfway up, the road widened to make room for a market place. A back lane, known as Backsides, East Back Row or Back Vennel (City Road) formed on the east side of the street, but on the west side of the High Street the steepness of the ground prevented the formation of a second back lane. The High Street in the second half of the eighteenth century 'which previously consisted of as many terraces as there were separate houses, was then brought to one inclined plane, while by the removal of the steps at the end of each separate pavement, the footway was thrown upon one gradual slope' (Black, 1839, 189). Despite this improvement Black observed in 1839 that 'Brechin is built on a hill, and notwithstanding all the improvement on the streets - and they have been many of late years - it is, and must be always a heavy pull from the lower to the high part of the town' (1939, 219).

Beyond the market place towards the North Port, or Over Port, the High Street continued in what was known as Timber Market, now Market Street. The garden ground of the Preceptory of Maison Dieu flanked Timber Market on the west side and on the east side were little holdings lying next to the Crofts in present-day Clerk Street (Thoms, 1977, 62). Both the Gallowgate and Cookston Loan converged near

the North Port. In the 1790s Timber Market became 'a regular, if not elegant street'. Town Council improvements in Timber Market meant the removal of thatch-covered foreshots (Black, 1839, 189).

The minor routes in medieval Brechin included the Bishop's Close which led west from the High Street and continued into Chanonry Wynd. The Nether West Wynd (Church Street) provided a west-bound exit from the town. Over Wynd or Upper West Wynd also led west of the High Street and is known today as St. Mary's Street and St. David's Street. Black noted that the Upper Wynd was 'formerly little else than a sink which was made a respectable thoroughfare', and St. Mary's Street was dismissed as 'previously scarce wide enough for one cart, and disfigured by an unseemly ditch on the north side' (Black, 1839, 189). Mealmarket Wynd, now Swan Street, was in Black's day 'yet too narrow for the intercourse in it' (1839, 172). Path Wynd, now Bridge Street, led up from the bridge and Meikle Mill, while Cadger Wynd (Union Street) ran to the Den Burn and continued as the highway to Montrose.

Market Area: The market of Brechin dates from the reign of David I and D. B. Thoms suggested that the date 1144 was the earliest possible for the establishment of that market (1977, 4). The market area was located in the High Street where the west side has broadened out into a crescent shape (Thoms, 1977, 138). In 1763 a flesh market was opened on the lower side of the pend leading into Bishop's Close and was used both as a market and a place of slaughter until 1797 when a new slaughterhouse was opened near the Den Burn (Black, 1839, 162). A meal market, which had been opened in 1722 in the present-day Swan Street on the site of an old tenement, closed in 1787 and was removed to the site of the flesh market (Black, 1839, 133). The first notice of a market cross at Brechin occurs in a 1364 note in the Montrose burgh archives that the sheriff of Forfar had permission to cast down the market cross of Brechin (Thoms, 1977, 7). The cross was noted to be in a ruinous state in 1734. Subsequently the town council had it rebuilt and paid for 'the casting of a pit for a vault to be built below the cross' (Thoms, 1977, 140). The cross was ultimately pulled down in 1767 and stones from it were used in the building of six wells (Black, 1839, 165). A circle of stones marked the site of the cross until 1837 when 'this memorial of bygone magnificence was entirely effaced by the devoted followers of Macadam' (Black, 1839, 166).

Ports: Brechin boasted three ports; the North, or Over Port, the South Port and West Port. The ports had been repaired in 1709 and 1733 by 'pinning and harling', but were removed about 1760 as useless 'incumbrances' (Black, 1839, 140). The

North Port stood in line of the gable of the house at No. 96 Market Street (Thoms, 1977, 143). On Wood's plan of 1822 the South Port is shown at the point when High Street meets Path Wynd (Bridge Street), while the West Port was situated in Castle Street just to the east of Convenor Lane.

Bridge: The bridge was outwith the burgh, but as Thoms has observed, it was vital to Brechin's economic survival (1977, 97). Several notices of bridge repair occur: in 1684, 1686, 1691, 1695 and also 1786 (Black, 1839, 171).

BUILDINGS

Cathedral: A cathedral at Brechin probably dates to the reign of David I at which time it was raised into an episcopal see. Survivals from any structure other than the present one was not suspected until 1900, when during restoration work, the southwest respond was stripped of its nineteenth-century plaster and disclosed a base about two feet (0.05m) higher than that of any other pillar in the nave. An arch four feet (1.22m) wide with Norman mouldings was found during subsequent excavations. The stone had apparently belonged to a chancel arch and along with other stones disinterred at the same time from the ruined chancel wall, indicated that a Norman church had originally stood on or near the site of the present building (Thoms, 1951, 3). The thirteenth-century cathedral, cruciform in shape and dedicated to the Holy Trinity, remained intact until major structural alterations were carried out in 1806. 'By general agreement' the aisles and transepts of the church were pulled down, leaving the nave to which new aisles and a roof were added (Black, 1839, 192). Thirteenth-century work still survives in the west doorway, two of the nave piers and in a portion of the side walls. The eighty-four foot (25.60m) long nave is flanked by eight pillars while a fifteenth-century tower guards the west door. The chancel is graced by an early seventeenth-century Flemish brass chandelier (Thoms, 1951, 8).

The most notable feature of the cathedral is the free-standing round tower which may have been associated with the religious community implied in the Chronicle of the Kings of Scotland. The tower, thought to be eleventh-century in date, stands eighty-six feet (26.21m) in height, capped with a conical roof added in the fourteenth century. The arched doorway is raised six feet (1.83m) above present ground level (Thoms, 1951, 19).

Chanonry: The Chanonry was a settlement separate in jurisdiction from the burgh. It housed the officials of the cathedral and the see and possibly pre-dated the 'toun'

of Brechin. The Chanonry developed in a small area to the west of High Street and south of present-day Church Street, and its ends lay near the West Port and the pend of the Bishop's Close. Between Chanonry Wynd and Church Lane were the manses and gardens of the four canons; the Precentor, Chancellor, Archdeacon and Subdean. Other ecclesiastical officials had residences across the wynd. On the west side of the Chanonry Wynd lay the ground of the college of Brechin, a cathedral school for boy choristers which was founded in the early fifteenth century and after the Reformation developed into the Grammar School of Brechin. The Manse of the Treasurer was on the site now occupied by Cathedral Hall (Thoms, 1951, 19). The Bishop's Palace stood on the north side of the Bishop's Close, and on the south side where the manse now stands the Bishop's garden sloped down to the Bishop's Orchards and Skinner's Burn (Thoms, 1951, 19).

Hospital: A hospital designated Maison Dieu (House of God) was founded by William de Brechin in the 1260s.   Bedesmen were still being maintained as late as 1582 and there are references to the mastership of the hospital till 1636 when the office was conjoined with a mastership in the grammar school (Cowan & Easson, 1976,172). Maison Dieu served as a residence for the schoolmaster in the seventeenth century, but by 1700 was in a ruinous condition. It was used as a stable until a fire swept through it in 1825 (Thoms, 1962, 22). The principle remaining fragment is thirteenth-century walling about forty feet (12.19m) in length.

Tolbooth: The first reference to a Tolbooth (pretorium) in Brechin occurs in 1450 (Thoms, 1977, 11).   In 1580 and 1697 there were notices of repairs being carried out on the Tolbooth which apparently stood on the corner of High Street and Nether West Wynd (Church Street). While the council and bailies' court met on the first floor, part of the ground floor was used as a jail.   A town council ordinance of 1767 which said that the Tolbooth stair 'shall be the Cross and mercat place of Brechin in all time coming' presents the only indication of the appearance of the pre-1789 Tolbooth (Thoms, 1977, 140). A new two-storey structure was built on the site of the old Tolbooth in 1789.

Grammar School: At the Reformation the town council took over the running of the College of Brechin and resolved to restore the building for use as the town's grammar school. In 1580, however, the council leased the Meikle Mill to the highest bidder and planned to use a 'part of the profit to bigg the skulhouse' (Thoms, 1977, 14). The old college, however, served as the burgh grammar school until 1814 when it was moved to a new site.

Houses: In 1762 the council in order to check fire danger in the town prohibited the repairing of houses with thatch and wooden vents and ordained that all new houses should be covered with slates or tiles and have vents covered up with stone (Black, 1839, 160).   The last thatched house in Brechin, located in Church Street, was pulled down in 1810.

Mills: The Little Mill stood on the west side of the High Street and belonged to the bishop.   It became town property after the Reformation and was converted into a waulk mill in 1605, but after 1693 fell into disuse (Black, 1839, 31).   It was driven by water conveyed in an artificial lade from a dam in Damacre Road, which was supplied from the Den Burn.   The Meikle Mill had been part of William de Brechin's endowment to the hospital of Maison Dieu and did not fall into the town's possession until 1541 (Thoms, 1977, 21).   It was located at the foot of Path Wynd within the royalty of the burgh, and formed a valuable part of the common good (Thoms, 1977, 74).

Archaeology

PREVIOUS WORK

No archaeological excavations have so far been undertaken in Brechin. A number of finds of interest, some of which are described below, are noted from the burgh. Unfortunately, none of these come from satisfactory archaeological contexts.

(1) Coin hoard and silver spoons: discovered in March, 1785, while 'digging a grave near the principal entry to the churchyard of Brechin', the finds comprised six silver spoons of fourteenth-century type, and an unrecorded number of silver pennies of Alexander III, Edward I and Edward II. The spoons and six of the coins are now in the National Museum of Antiquities, Edinburgh, the remainder being dispersed. The style of the spoons, and the dates of the coins, indicate a date for the deposition of the hoard in the first half of the fourteenth century. (Archaeologia Scotica (later PSAS), iii, 1813, 41-2; Lindsay, 1845, 160; Thompson, 1956, No. 55; Curle, 1924, 107 passim; How, 1935, 149 and illustration).

(2) Coin hoard and silver brooches: five circular silver brooches, three inscribed IHESVS NAZARENVS REX IVDEORVM, were found in 1891 'in a garden at Brechin, with a quantity of coins of the Edwards' (Purchases, PSAS, XXV (1890-91), 417). No details of the coins are preserved (Thompson, 1956, No. 56), but the brooches are now held in the National Museum of Antiquities, Edinburgh, and are described by Callander (1924, 160ff).

(3) Cross-slab: a rectangular cross-slab of ninth- or tenth-century date (Curle, 1935, 407) was 'dug up in a garden, formerly a portion of an ancient churchyard, near the Cathedral' (Romilly Allen, 1903, iii, 249-50). It consists of a slab of Old Red Sandstone, sculptured in relief on three sides. The cross depicted is equal-armed, the central medallion bearing a representation of the Virgin and Child, with an explanatory inscription in Latin and Greek characters which reads - 'Saint Mary the Mother of Christ'. Other biblical representations fill the arms, background and sides.

(4) Early Christian 'Hogback' stone: this elaborately carved and very important monument now lies at the west end of the south aisle of Brechin Cathedral. Formerly,

it had been used, upside down, as a grave-cover either in the church or churchyard, as the base carries a worn inscription of sixteenth-century date or later (Chalmers, 1848). Its primary use would have been as a grave-slab, and it is of a type derived from Irish-Norse house-shaped tomb covers of the tenth century. This example can be dated to the early eleventh century (Lang, 1974, 206-35). Also see Walker, 1885, 408-9; Romilly Allen, 1903, 250-52.

(5) Roman coin: a 'small brass' of Constantius Gallus was found during the restoration of the Cathedral (MacDonald, 1934, 32).

ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROBLEMS

Perhaps the principal question which might be solved by archaeological means in Brechin is that concerning the reason for the establishment of the burgh. While it is known that a monastic community existed before this time, it is not at all clear whether an adjoining and dependent secular village community also existed. If there was such, and it became absorbed into the burgh itself, this might to some extent account for the extremely awkward axis of the High Street along a steep and difficult slope. Had the layout of the burgh been planned from its inception, it seems likely that a more practical route would have been chosen. At any rate, further investigation of the monastery itself is desirable.

Other than along the High Street, the development of Brechin appears to have been deliberately planned, with coherent 'plan units' clearly visible. Although an attempt has been made to map the periods of burgh expansion at the end of this report, excavation and detailed documentary work alone can establish the actual dates at which the various units were established and provide a more detailed picture of town growth. For instance, property boundary alignments on the west side of High Street between Church Street and St. David Street suggest that the market area, in the expanded area of High Street, might formerly have been substantially more extensive. Excavation might assist in confirming or denying this hypothesis.

Another little-known aspect of Brechin's history is that concerning the construction of the town's buildings. It is virtually unknown whether wattle, heavy timber, or substantial stone was used to construct the various domestic, public and industrial buildings throughout the town, particularly during the earlier centuries of the burgh's development. Even less is known of the domestic possessions of the Brechin townspeople; their pottery, tools and other equipment. Here, excavation alone can provide the answers. Other, more specific problems exist which for reasons of space

will not be gone into here.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL POTENTIAL

The lack of excavation and of properly-provenanced finds from Brechin make an assessment of the archaeological potential almost impossible at this stage. This is further hampered by the extensive amount of terracing which has taken place within the town, and particularly in the oldest areas. Portions of the previously stepped High Street might well lie preserved below the present slope of that street, although the construction of the slope might equally have involved the removal of the earlier terraces. Without test excavations, this is impossible to determine either way. Much the same applies to the stepped gardens either side of High Street. Here, the natural slope has been made into terraces, which might have protected, or destroyed, foundations and structures of the medieval period which originally occupied the sites. The same situation occurs along each side of St. David's Street, Swan Street and St. Mary's Street.

Some areas, however, might be expected to have a higher degree of survival than others. This applies particularly to the back garden sites south of Church Street and along Bishop's Close and Channonry Wynd, where building has never been extensive in the recent past. Pointers to survival come from the discoveries of the coin hoard (1, above); the cross-slab (2, above) and an arch containing stones with Norman mouldings 'at some depth' below the Churchyard level. The latter is a supportive feature of the Cathedral, and was thus left in situ and reburied. (ex. inf. D. B. Thoms). Those frontages on the west side of High Street, below the market area, might also yield medieval remains as it is likely that sites were not levelled before rebuilding in this area, as the earlier foundations would have provided a level base for later building at the top of the steep slope down to Skinner's Burn.

FUTURE REDEVELOPMENT

A few large areas of the historic core of Brechin have already been recently redeveloped, mainly for housing and car-parking facilities. One or two open sites remain which are likely to be developed, but the total amount of redevelopment envisaged in the foreseeable future is very limited. Here and there old and derelict buildings within the town centre will be demolished, with the probability that the vacated sites will be used for car parking, at least in the short term. The threat to archaeology posed by redevelopment is therefore low at present, but nevertheless insidious.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The immediate threat to Brechin's archaeology is not extensive, although substantial portions of the historic core have already been lost. However, as the degree of survival of early archaeological deposits is uncertain, all those areas which remain must be considered to be of primary importance.

The first step must be to establish in which areas preservation of archaeological levels is high enough to warrant excavation. This should be done by trial excavation on sites which are presently open or which become vacant in the future, preferably by timetabling redevelopment in such a way that time is made available for investigation of this nature. Should any site be proven to be archaeologically productive, a decision must then be made through consultation with the various bodies concerned on the possibility of major excavations taking place.

The position of Brechin has meant that it has played an important part in the trade and economy of Angus and the Mearns since its establishment in the twelfth century. Furthermore, it is one of a very few Scottish burghs known to have had a possibly sizeable pre-burghal community on the same site. It is therefore vital to Scottish burgh studies in general, as well as to the study of Brechin itself, to learn more of the economic basis, social history and physical development of the town from its beginnings.

Archaeology, with the corresponding documentary research, constitutes the primary means by which an understanding of the history of our Scottish burghs can be expanded in the future. It is essential that such investigation be allowed to take place as and when the opportunities arise.

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MAP SOURCES

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To Edzell &
Fettercairn

To
Laurencekirk
& Stonehaven

Land over 100m

Castles

To
Laurencekirk

To
Inverbervie

R. North Esk

N

BRECHIN

To Forfar
& Kirriemuir

R. South Esk

MONTROSE

1 Km

To Arbroath

To Arbroath

BRECHIN

Burgh Expansion

Legend:

- Pre-charter settlement c.1200
- Charter Burgh c.1650
- c.1800
- Frontages Developed by c.1800

Extant buildings constructed before 1700:-

1. Round Tower
2. Cathedral
3. Maisondieu Chapel – south wall & door

☆ Sites of important Medieval buildings:-

a. Maisondieu
b. Tolbooth
c. Bishop's Palace
d. Little Mill
e. Castle
f. Meikle Mill

● Port (site of)

Map labels:

N

To Laurencekirk & Aberdeen

COOKSTON LOAN

GALLOWGATE

Den Burn

West Back Row

TIMBERMARKET

Den Burn

GOLDS YARDS

UPPER WEST WYND

MEALMARKET WD

St MARY ST

Cousons Lane

To Forfar

NETHER WEST WYND

HIGH STREET

EAST BACK ROW

Mill Dam

Bishop's Close

Channonry Wynd

College Yards

Skinner's Burn

CADGER'S WYND

PAH WYND

South Esk

River

To Arbroath via Brechin Bridge

To Montrose

0   100   200m

BRECHIN

N

Listed buildings –
all categories

–··–··– Conservation area

Sites effectively
redeveloped

Open sites/car parks

GALLOW HILL

MARKET STREET

ST. ANDREWS ST.

CLERK ST.

SOUTHESK ST.

ST.

SWAN ST.

ST. DAVID STREET

HIGH STREET

ST. MARY ST.

CHURCH ST.

CITY ROAD

SOUTHESK ST.

Skinner's Burn

Brechin
Castle

UNION ST.

BRIDGE STREET

River South Esk

Esk

MONTROSE STREET

Metres
0   100   200