

Archaeological Investigations at Christie's Bar, Kinnoull Street Perth.

Background

In July of 2017 a small team of enthusiasts and professional archaeologists were granted access to the cellars below Christie's Bar, Perth, to investigate the potential for survival of early architectural remains associated with the former Dominican Friary. The event - entitled 'Royal murder, Friars and beer' - was initiated as part of the Year of History, Heritage and Archaeology, and devised and organised through Perth and Kinross Heritage Trust and the Scotland's Urban Past project hosted by Historic Environment Scotland.

Blackfriars

The Dominican Friary at Perth was built outside and north of the limits of the thirteenth century settlement. It occupied the NE suburb which included the former royal gardens gifted by Alexander II in 1244. In the absence of a castle it was used as the royal residence in Perth for just over 200 years until James I was murdered there in his bedchamber in 1437.

Blackfriars was one of three religious houses in Perth that were largely destroyed during the Reformation on Monday 11 May 1559. John Knox records that the monasteries walls were reduced to bare walls in just three days, but this does not mean that any parts were necessarily pulled down at this time. Demolition over the succeeding centuries is not recorded, but it would have provided a handy source of stone for Cromwell's citadel, built in 1652.

The location of the Friary is not shown on the earliest town map of Perth, produced by Louis Petit, but was marked at the western end of Blackfriars Wynd by Henry Buist on a plan produced in 1765 and reproduced in Milne R. (ed) 'The Blackfriars of Perth' in 1893.

What we already knew.

Christie's bar is located within the curtilage of the former Friary, which was established in Perth in 1231, probably at the instigation of King Alexander II of Scotland.

Archaeological excavations carried out in the early 1980s helped to confirm 18th century cartographic evidence that the Friary extended to the west end of Blackfriar's Wynd.

Fittis in his *1885 Ecclesiastical Annals of Perth* placed the Friary at the 'corner of the present Kinnoull St and Carpenter St' – the location of Christie's Bar. Temptingly, Fittes also adds in his account that 'part of the ruins (of the Friary) could be seen before the building of Mr (John) Lowe's (dance) Academy' which was opened in 1816, but not with any certainty on the same site.

Recording Methodology

Mapping the cellar space within Christie's was made considerably easier by sourcing existing plans of the building. Staff at the AK Bell Library and Archive in Perth were able to locate an architect's plan of the property detailing alteration of the premises into a public house dated 1936 (DGP/1936/62). The plans, elevations and sections included a representation of the existing cellar space, the dimensions of which proved sufficiently reliable to serve as an outline template of the cellar footprint from which to expand our knowledge. Subsequent changes and evidence for phases of

construction were recorded by taking supplemental measurements accompanied by photographs and notes.

Physical environment

The cellar has been subdivided since the architect's plans of 1936 and the subsequently smaller, south end of the cellar is now entered through a hatch at ground floor level within the public house, located between the public bar and the kitchen. A shallow wooden stairway on the east side of the cellar gives access to a low, irregular space with exposed wooden and rolled steel floor joists.

The northern end of the cellar is entered through a doorway located between the brick walls of an inserted storeroom and a stud wall partition.

The floors within each of the compartments are comprised of concrete layers of varying quality; the north end is lower, and slopes gently toward a drain, whilst the south end is raised some 300mm higher forming a step.

All the surfaces within the cellar, excepting the concrete floors are coated with white paint which to a greater or lesser extent obscures detail of the masonry components.

Where the overall dimensions of the cellar in comparison to the 1936 plan and section were demonstrated to be reliable, they were of little use in providing assistance with phasing. The architect's drawings, although accurate, merely record an empty space between wall surfaces and make no distinction of any architectural features or materials. What the drawings do show is that anything not recorded within or immediately outwith the defined areas is a post 1936 addition. The majority of construction post 1936 seems to employ red brick bonded by Portland cement; other components are concrete and steel.

Head space within the cellar was an average of 2.00m at the north end of the cellar reduced to an average some 1.7m at the south end.

Findings

Despite the limitations presented by the surface coatings on most vertical areas of the cellar space it was apparent that all the masonry to just below ceiling level was comprised of stone. The majority of the masonry could be broadly sub-divided into zones of random, coursed and face dressed grey-green sandstone rubble construction, with a rough plinth course of river cobbles of varying size. There was evidence of both coarse lime mortar and clay bonding in the limited areas it was possible to examine.

At two locations it was possible to record a wall width in section where areas of the masonry had been demolished to provide the present day stair access.

Wall construction would seem to have been formalised at the angles where both in-band and out-band quoins could be identified, particularly where there is a brick-blocked doorway on a staggered alignment, a facet faithfully recorded in the architect's drawing of 1936 but not otherwise described. The enigma of this feature is in part where such an opening would have led to as no cellar space is recorded in the 1936 section drawings. The width of the wall segment immediately to the south is quite wide being some 630mm and could be a segment of a previously external wall. As there are

no jambs or other rebates visible in either margin within the cellar space this is probably an interior wall face. The location of the opening at this level might indicate a former stairway access.

The architects plan also shows a curious dogleg in the east wall that reflects the staggered doorway to the north. Although the physical evidence for the wall here has been removed this feature is reflected on the return forming the present stairwell access. It is possible that this rebate indicates the presence of another former opening, which might have had a bearing on the location of the present access which is at variance to that indicated – or at least proposed – on the 1936 plan.

The visible extent of any early masonry at the south end of the cellar has largely been obscured by alterations post 1936 that probably included the raising of the original floor level.

Rubble masonry that forms the south wall has been subsequently tanked or stabilised with brick and the acute angle at the south west corner is now entirely enclosed making any correlation between it and the east wall speculative at best. The south wall forms a butt joint against the west wall of the cellar, which has a slight, rising batter defined by discernible horizontal courses forming slight steps. On this basis solely the south cellar wall is deemed to be secondary to that forming the other elevations within the cellar. The brick tanking and raising of the floor level is probably a direct response to penetrating ground waters that were in evidence during the time of the investigations and are likely to have caused flooding in times past

At no point within the visible elevations was there any evidence for a formalised wall head, suggesting that no such feature survives here. Consequently there is no way of telling whether the roofed space was of timber or stone, even vaulted.

Conclusions

Based on observations made within the cellar, none of the exposed rubble masonry would appear to be of 18th century or later date. From the map evidence it is not until the early 19th century that domestic and secular buildings begin to appear in the area that would become bounded by Blackfriars, Carpenter Street and Kinnoull Street.

Certainly none of the architecture within the cellar could be described as polite and on that basis it is likely to have been built as a private rather than a public space, in the manner of an undercroft or cellar. It would seem that a number of buildings that superseded the Friary on the site were built, literally upon foundations of the earlier structures, and in some cases made use of the existing cellar spaces too.

From the criteria presented to the investigators it would seem that there is the strongest likelihood that the masonry exposed in the cellars of Christie's bar pertain to the former Dominican Friary.

Acknowledgments

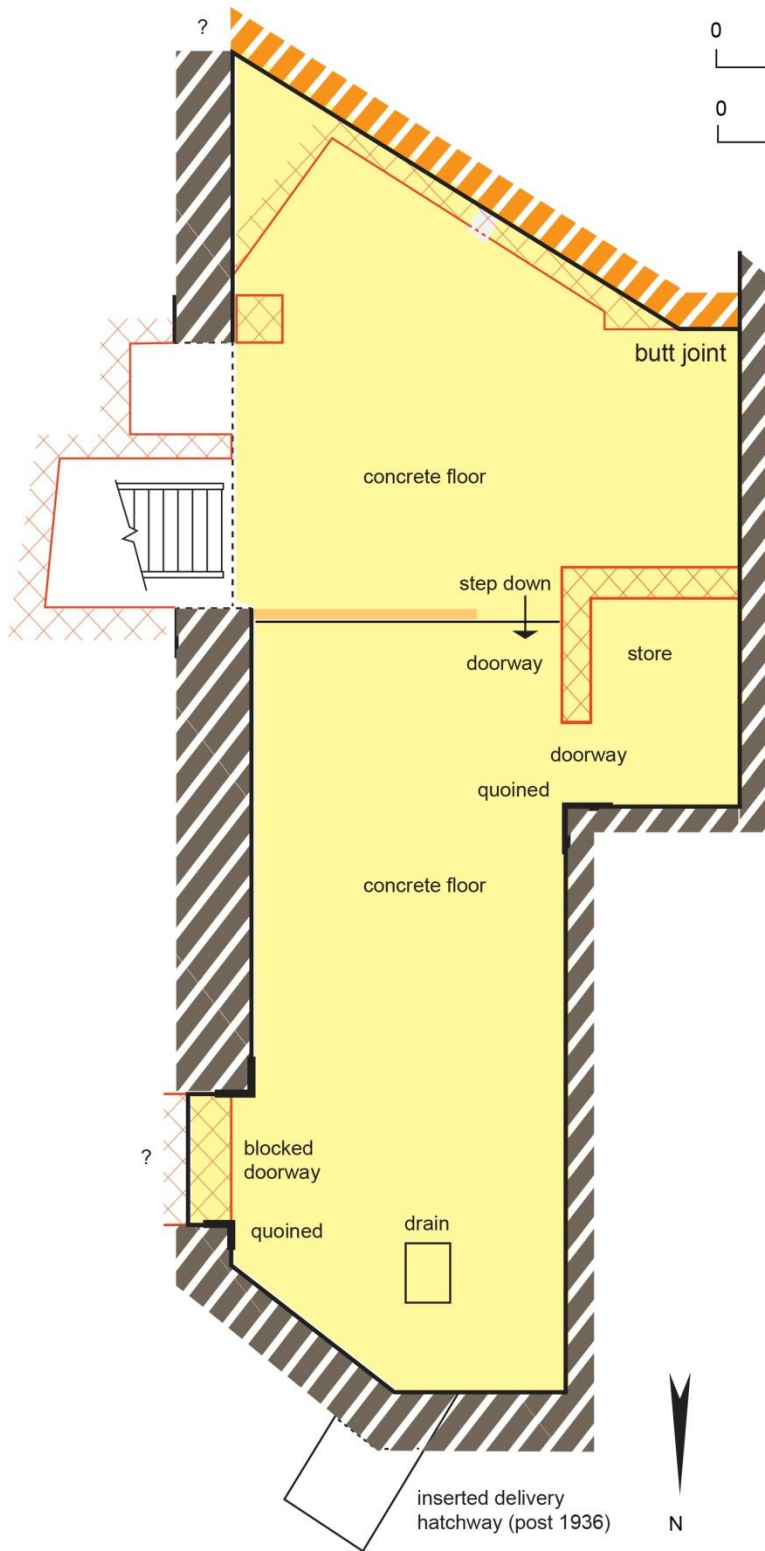
Scotland's Urban Past and Perth and Kinross Heritage Trust would like to thank the following for their assistance in making this workshop event possible: Helen Stewart, Proprietor Christie's Bar, Staff at the AK Bell Library and the volunteers and contributors on the day.

References

Bowler, Cox and Smith, D, A and C. (1995) Four excavations in Perth', Proc Soc Antiq Scot, vol. 125, 1995. Page(s): 917-8, 939-47, 952-89, 994-6

NLS Map Library Online

PK Bell Library, Perth. Architect's plan detailing alteration of the premises into a public house dated 1936 prepared for Peter K Stoddart. (DGP/1936/62).



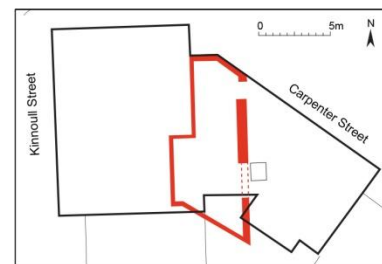
Christie's Bar

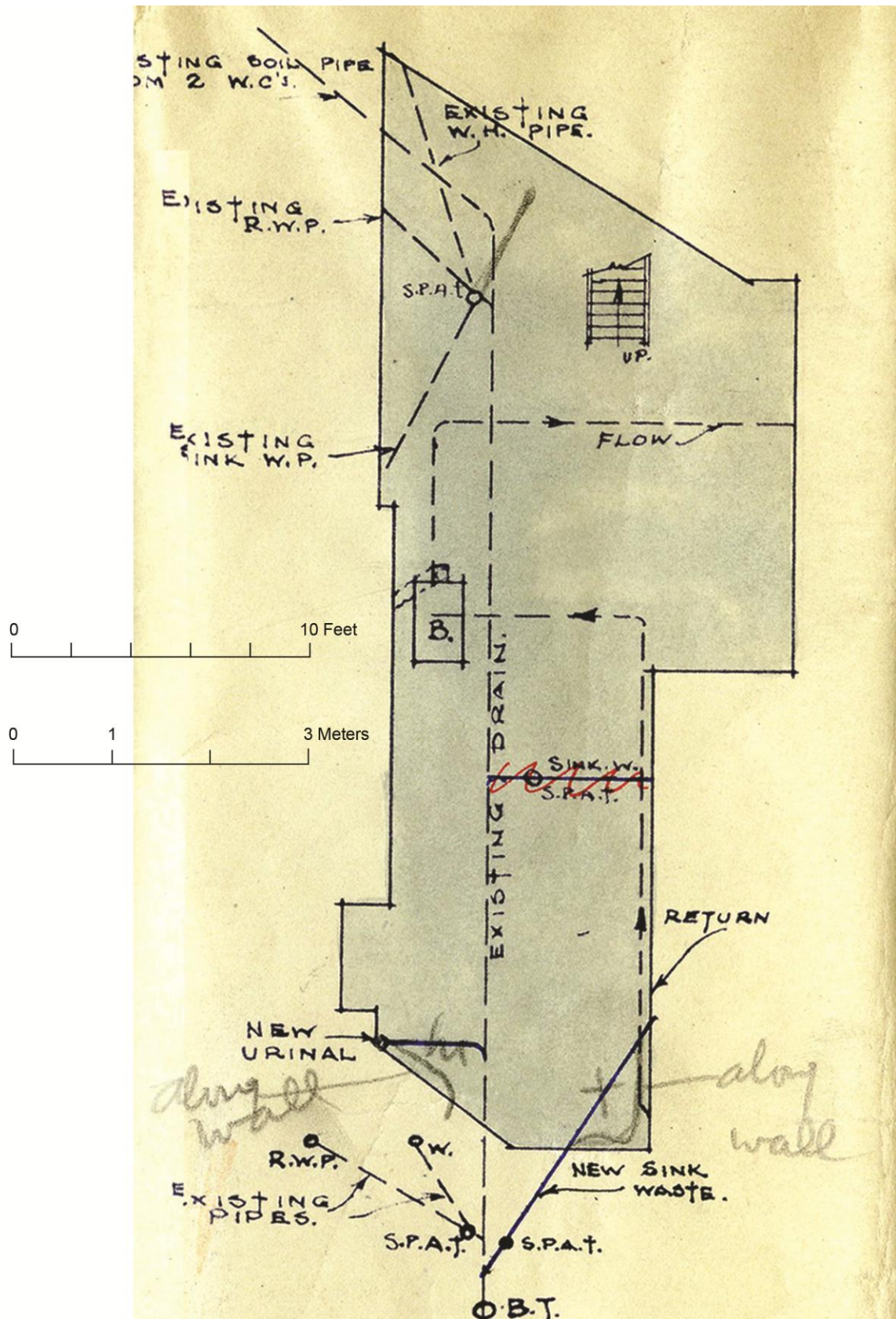
73 Kinnoull St, Perth

Canmore ID 28292

NGR NO 1168 2385

-  earliest phase masonry
-  later phase masonry
-  post 1936 brickwork
-  1936 cellar footprint





Cellar plan. Extract from architect's plan dated 1936. Perth Archive catalogue number DGP/1936/62