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Client: TPS Consult
Project Code: PPJ04

HMP Perth, Edinburgh Road, Perth
Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment

Application Reference: 03/00428/CROWN

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PROJECT SUMMARY SHEET (PPJ04)

Client	TPS Consult, on behalf of the Scottish Prison Service
National Grid Reference	NO 117 223
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Illustrations	George F. Geddes & Mike Kimber
Desk-Based Assessment	George F. Geddes
Schedule	
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Summary

This report describes a desk-based assessment undertaken regarding HMP Perth in advance of refurbishment by the Scottish Prison Service. The main prison block – containing elements of the original Robert Reid building of 1810-12, as well as Thomas Brown’s work of 1840-42 and Robert Matheson’s work of 1852-57 – is a Category A Listed Building. There are also a number of Category B and C(S) Listed Buildings on the site. Map references suggest the site was agricultural in character until the construction of the Napoleonic prison in 1810. After two years of use as originally conceived, the buildings housed military equipment until 1833, and were then used as a granary until 1840 when the government began its conversion to the first general prison in Scotland. In the later 19th and 20th centuries there were considerable alterations to the historic layout of the site and its buildings.

BACKGROUND

This project was commissioned by TPS Consult, on behalf of the Scottish Prison Service, in advance of the development of HMP Perth which lies adjacent to the Edinburgh Road on the southern outskirts of the burgh. This complex was the first general prison in Scotland, having been originally constructed as a prisoner of war holding facility during the Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815), and is potentially one of the earliest in Europe. Founded in 1810, the prison fulfilled its original function for two years. Major alterations to the layout of the site followed in the 1840s and 1850s.

Because of the prominent position that HMP Perth holds in the development of the judicial and punitive system in Scotland and Europe, the complex has been designated as having specific architectural and historic interest and, therefore, many of the buildings of the original c.1810 phase and the major rebuilding of 1840 are listed. As such, they are subject to detailed planning conditions in the case of development. The intention of this legislation is to facilitate the successful development of the site whilst maintaining and improving understanding of its historic past. This report represents the results of a desk-based assessment prepared in advance of the alteration and partial demolition of HMP Perth. An agreed Method Statement for this desk-based assessment, based on the Terms of Reference (03 December 2003) produced by Perth and Kinross Area Archaeologist, was submitted on 19 January 2005.

METHODOLOGY

In order to contextualise the prison, predict the likelihood of archaeological preservation and aid the interpretation of the building's fabric, a desk-based assessment of literary and cartographic resources was undertaken prior to survey. The National Library for Scotland Map Library and the National Monuments Record for Scotland, both in Edinburgh, were consulted. Further research was undertaken in Perth, in the local studies and archive sections of the A K Bell Library, the records of the Perth Museum and Art Gallery and the Sites and Monuments Record held by Perth and Kinross Heritage Trust. Throughout, it has been important to recognise that Perth had a town prison that exists before and during the initial use of 'the Depot', as the Napoleonic prison was known. Indeed, records in many of the archives in both Perth and Edinburgh confuse and conflate evidence to these two, quite separate, institutions.

RESULTS (Figures 1 & 2)

It is probable that this site, with a commanding view of the River Tay and the surrounding farmland, has been used throughout prehistory. However, records relating to its history before government ownership are negligible and archaeological evidence consists only of stray finds of flint arrowheads (NMRS NO12SW 26).

Consultation of the cartographic record suggests that the area occupied by the prison, land formerly owned by the Moncrieff family, was probably agricultural in character until the early 19th century. However, the inaccuracy of the maps, particularly that of Thompson, published in 1827, indicates that ephemeral vernacular buildings might

have been missed. Indeed, Thompson fails to include the Napoleonic prison which had been established a decade before his survey. The large-scale map evidence does little to enlighten the evolution of the prison within its perimeter wall, since much of the building work involved the preparation of detailed architectural drawings, many of which survive in the NMRS and are included as appendices in the Conservation Statement produced by TPS Consult (SPS 2004). However, the Ordnance Survey town plan produced in 1860 does show the layout and function of the prison buildings in detail.

Consultation of the National Archive of Scotland produced a wealth of information, the majority of which lies outwith the interest of this study and has been included in the Conservation Statement. In particular, the archive includes a number of architectural plans and elevations including such detail as the position of sunken floors in the 19th century buildings, features that are likely to have been preserved in the archaeological record.

The 'Depot' was originally constructed between 1810 and 1812, and opened in March 1812. It was built on land previously owned by the Moncrieff family, hence the adjacent Moncrieff Island in the River Tay below. George Penny (1836) suggests that the local council swapped this site for the area in the town formerly occupied by Gowrie House, which was subsequently, and perhaps unnecessarily condemned and demolished to be replaced by a local prison. With the site secured through this complex agreement, construction began with a workforce of 1500 men in 1811. This initial construction, overseen by Robert Reid (1774-1856), Chief Government Architect in Scotland, housed approximately 7,000 prisoners at its zenith, including many from the Battle of Salamanca in July 1812. After the Battle of Waterloo in June 1815, the depot became a military store until 1833 and then a granary from 1833-1840. This initial phase comprised a large enclosed area with a half-octagon at the east end and a square at the other. The octagonal end contained a large accommodation block along each segment, supplemented by an exercise yard, shed and privy for each of the five blocks. In the central area, a guard tower overlooked the prison accommodation flanked by a kitchen building and stores. At the western end of the enclosure there were two large hospital blocks, one on either side of the camp, and the whole area was enclosed by a large wall and walkway, supplemented by an internal ditch or canal. In the area between the two hospital blocks, but outwith the enclosed secure area, was the officer and guard accommodation.

Many of these buildings have been subsequently demolished or considerably altered, and the initial layout of the octagonal area, with the accommodation blocks parallel to the enclosure wall, has been entirely replaced by a radial pattern. It is extremely likely that intrusive archaeological works will uncover the foundations and / or floor levels of some of these original buildings. In addition, an emergency archaeological watching brief, undertaken in 1999 in the north-east part of the prison, uncovered evidence for human remains and the foundations of the original enclosure wall, as well as what is probably one edge of the internal ditch (Bowler 2004, 145).

The human remains are thought to be those of French prisoners-of-war (Cachart 1999). In addition, the excavator suggested that they were probably re-deposited, indicating the possibility that human remains relating to the early use of the prison may present themselves in other areas of the enclosure during archaeological work.

Therefore, the potential for uncovering archaeological remains relating to this first period of use is high.

The research undertaken for the Conservation Statement did not uncover specific evidence for alterations to the site that took place between 1815 and 1840, but by this year the decision had been taken to alter the depot for Scotland's first general prison. These works were in preparation for the conversion to a general prison, which opened in March 1842. The architect for this second major phase was Thomas Brown. The main alterations included the infilling of the ditch/canal and the demolition of the majority of the buildings in the eastern part of the site including four of the original five accommodation blocks, as well as the six sheds and six privies. The construction at this time included two large radially arranged accommodation blocks and a chapel. The 1840s accommodation blocks – the more southerly of which survives down to the present-day – were of four storeys and a basement and will have destroyed archaeologically sensitive deposits within their footprint, including some of the sheds and parts of accommodation Blocks 2 and 4 from the c.1812 build.

Further additions continued through the 1850s with the addition of two supplementary accommodation blocks (A Hall and D Hall) under the instruction of Robert Matheson, Principal Architect of the Office of Works in Scotland. This work likely removed much of the foundation remains of the north and south prison blocks of c.1812. Continued alterations until 1947 were significant, but perhaps by providence or intention, largely avoided the foundations of earlier buildings. They will, however, have disturbed any archaeological deposits earlier than 1810 that had survived relatively intact. Further, it was in this period, between 1857 and 1947, that the enclosure area was increased instigating the destruction of a large section of the perimeter boundary and undermining the original layout and plan. In 1948, B Hall, built by Thomas Brown in 1842, was burnt down and demolished; it was subsequently replaced by a kitchen block on the same orientation. The officers and guards accommodation in the north-western area of the enclosure was also substantively altered around 1947.

Twentieth century alterations to the area have continued apace, though they are largely minor in comparison to those of the 19th century. Certainly, further truncation of archaeological deposits will have occurred due to extensions and alterations to existing structures, and new construction.

DISCUSSION

The results of the desk-based assessment suggest that the area of proposed development at HMP Perth is likely to contain significant archaeological remains, principally relating to the initial construction of a prisoner-of-war camp during the Napoleonic Wars. It is possible that remains of earlier activity on the site could exist as negative features, although, given the intensity of building works in the last 195 years, any remains are likely to be elusive and truncated. Careful placement of evaluation trenches will allow a characteristic sample of the sub-surface archaeology to be examined and will allow the location and examination of many of the 'lesser' structures of the Napoleonic depot, such as privies and sheds. In addition, it will be possible to place some of the archaeological evaluation trenches in such a way that

they should encounter the more substantial footings of the original c.1812 accommodation blocks. Furthermore, the perimeter ditch and walls of the original layout probably survive as sub-surface features and it is likely that associated material, deposits and, possibly, human remains may throw further light on the development of the site and its place in the history of Scotland.

REFERENCES

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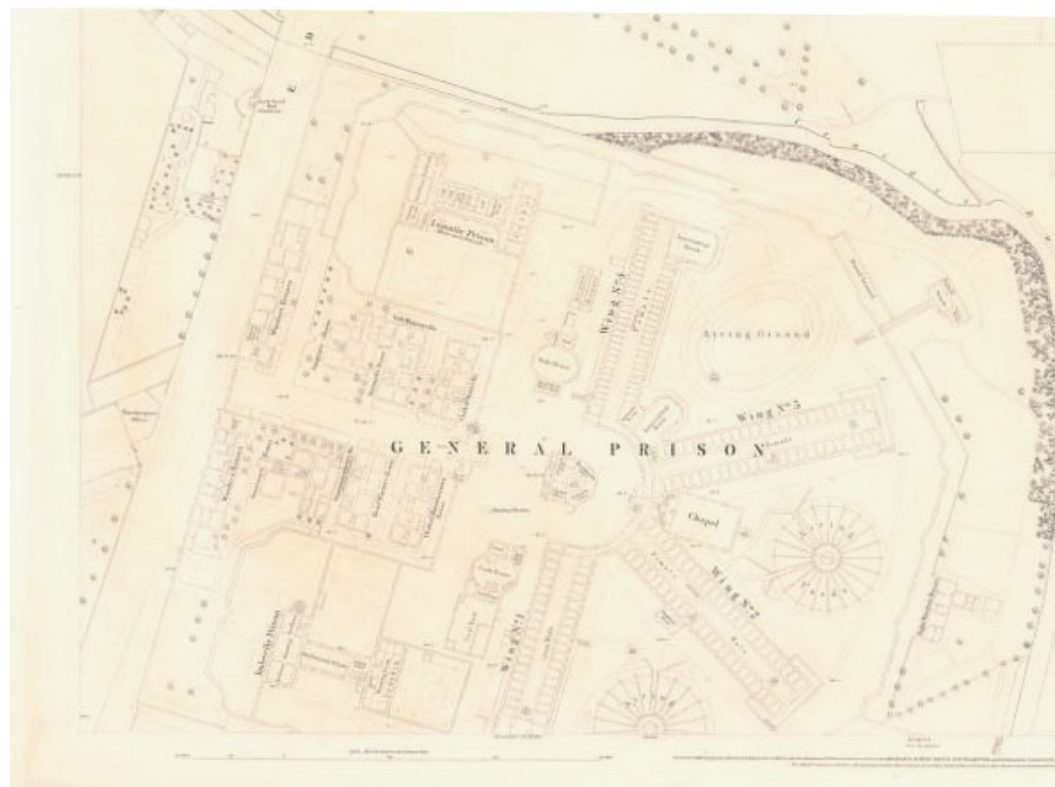
Stobie's map circa 1805



Thompson's map circa 1827



Knox's map circa 1850

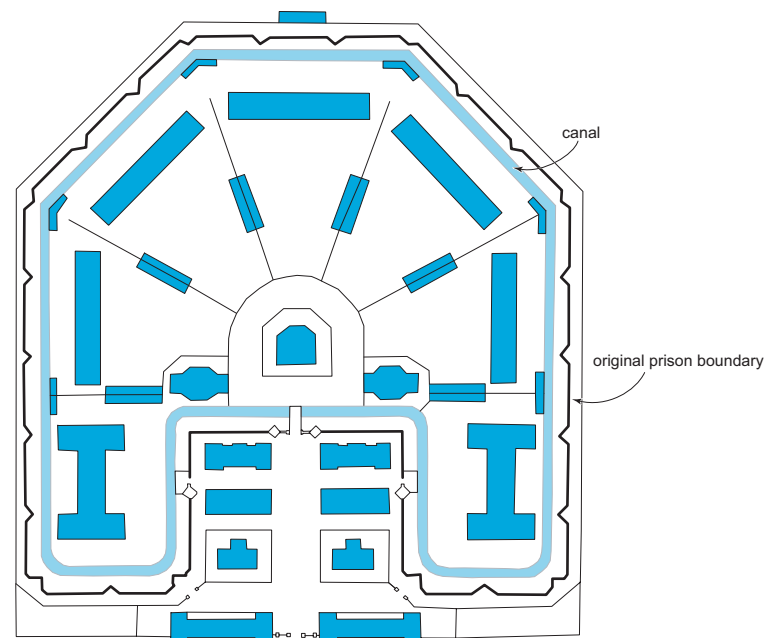


Ordnance Survey circa 1860

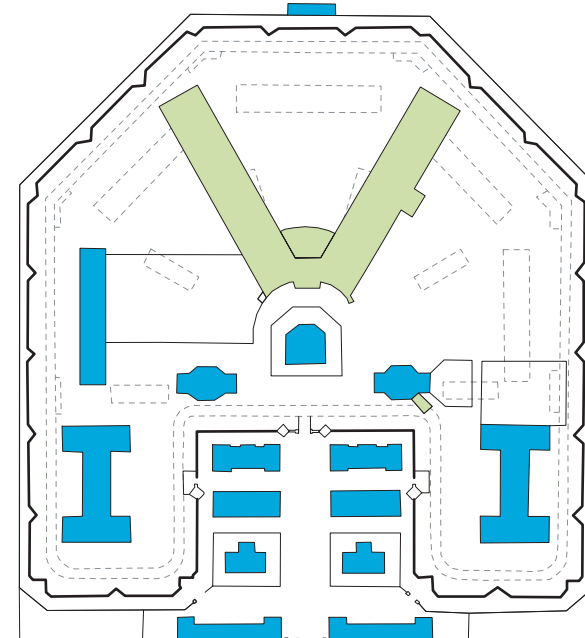


Ordnance Survey circa 1898

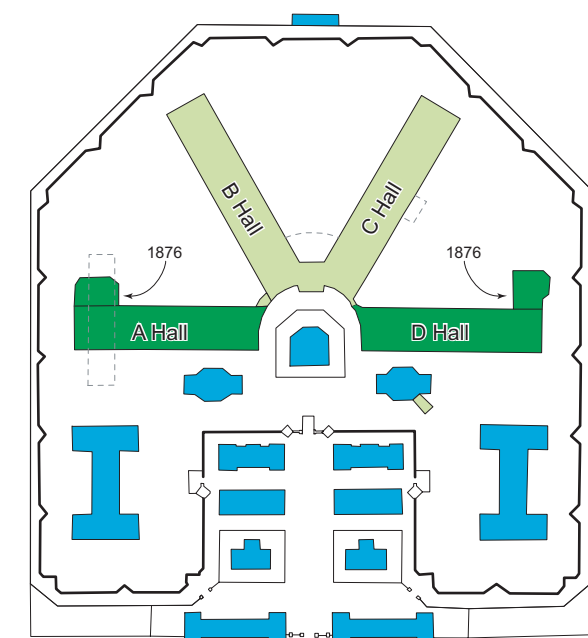
Figure 1: HMP Perth - Map Regression



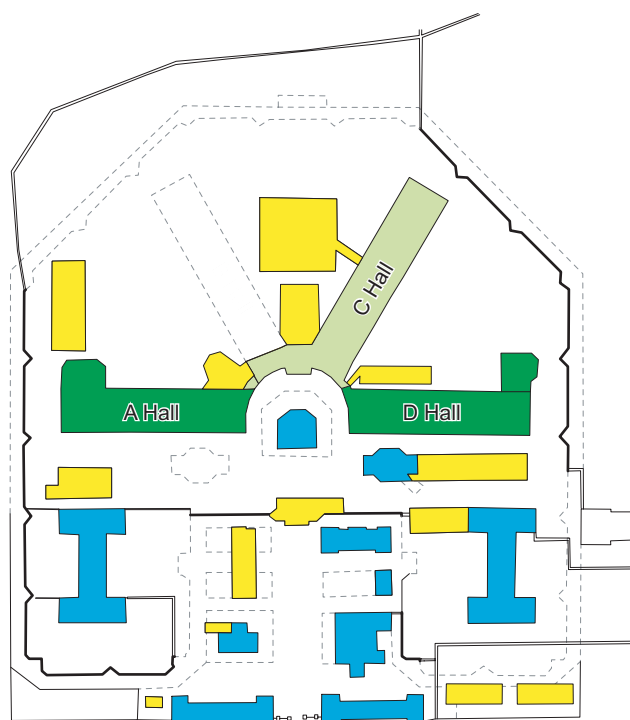
circa 1811



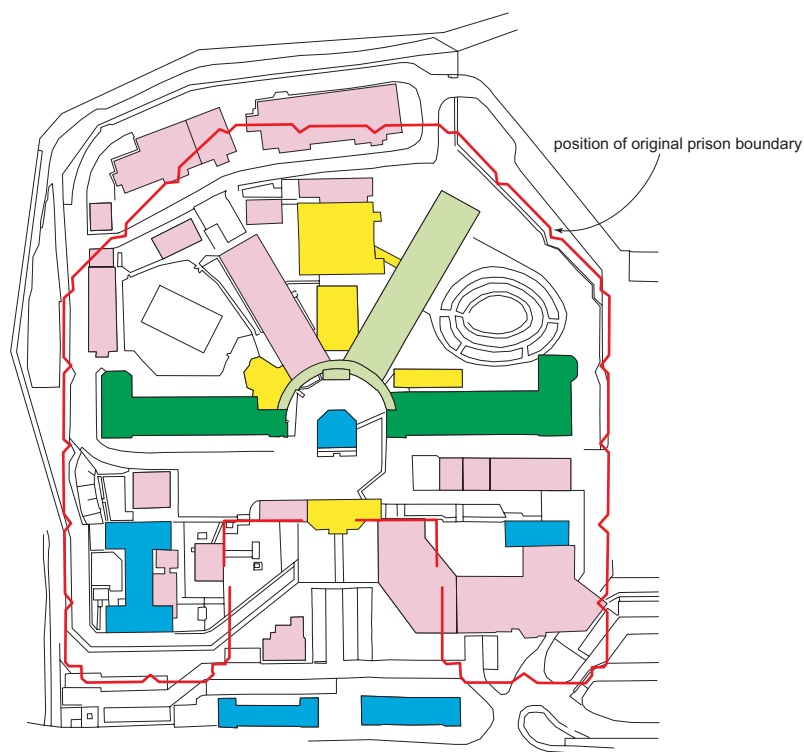
circa 1842



circa 1857



circa 1947



present

KEY

- Demolished
- 1811
- 1842
- 1857
- 1947
- Present



Figure 2: Structural Development of HMP Perth c1811 to present