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Archaeological Evaluation at HMP Perth

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PROJECT SUMMARY SHEET

<i>Client</i>	MORGAN ASHURST, ON BEHALF OF SCOTTISH PRISON SERVICE
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<i>Address</i>	HMP PERTH, EDINBURGH ROAD, PERTH
<i>Parish</i>	PERTH
<i>Council</i>	PERTH & KINROSS
<i>NMRS Number</i>	N/A
<i>SMR Number</i>	N/A
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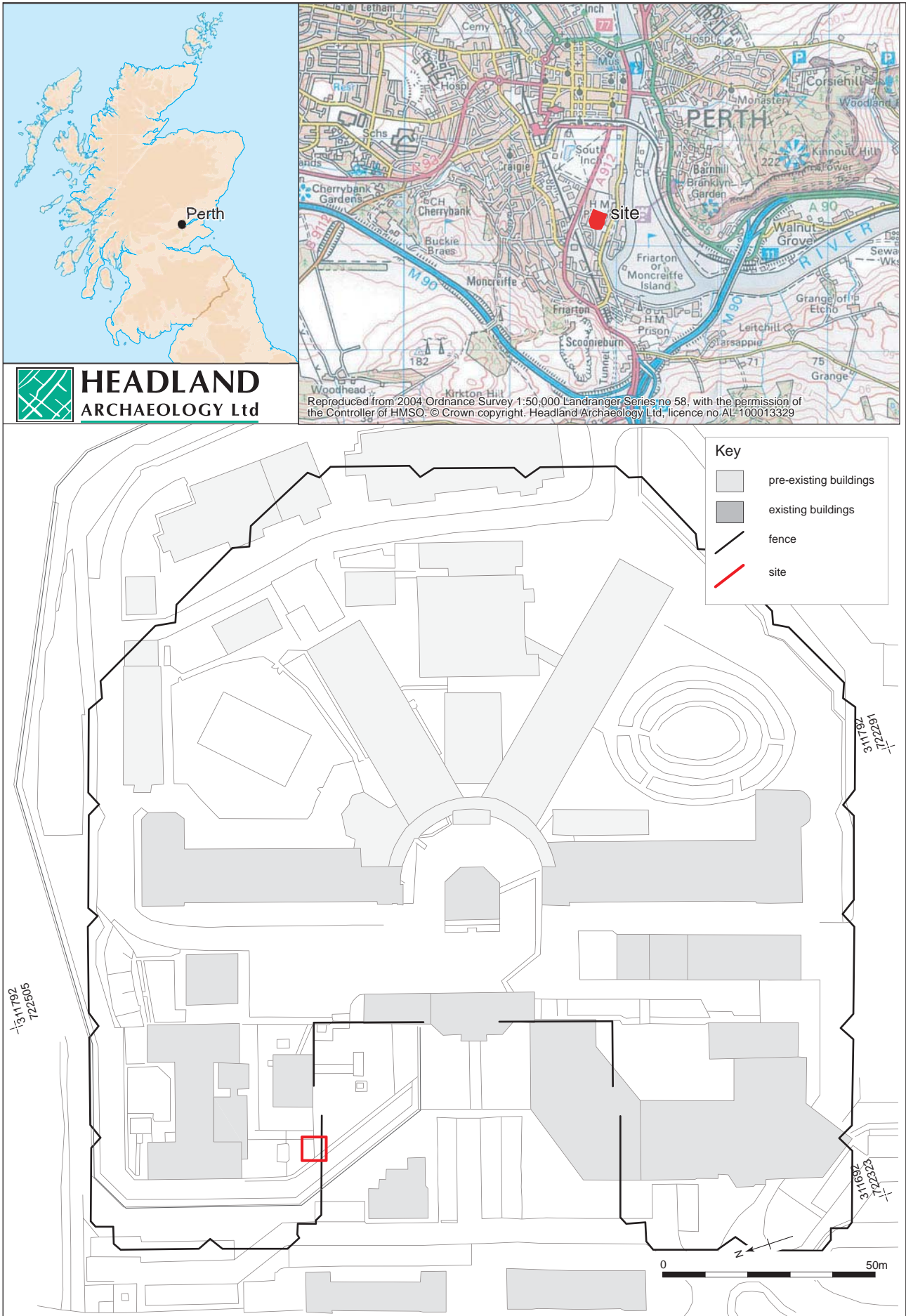


Figure 1
Location Plan

Archaeological Evaluation at HMP Perth

By Kate Bain

Headland Archaeology was commissioned by Morgan Ashurst on behalf of the Scottish Prison Service to undertake an archaeological evaluation at HMP Perth. The work formed part of Phase III of an ongoing redevelopment programme to improve and modernise the facility, which has involved both demolitions and new builds across the site.

The site was originally developed in the early 19th century as a Napoleonic prisoner-of-war camp; it was subsequently redeveloped into Scotland's first general prison in the 1840s. Plans of the site suggest that the general layout of the prison remained substantially unaltered over the 100 year period between the late 1850's and late 1940's, but was subject to quite dramatic changes of the subsequent 50 years.

The evaluation was carried out adjacent to the B-Listed hospital block, scheduled for demolition as part of the Phase III works. The archaeological evaluation consisted of a single trench, excavated in the Estates Yard and revealed both the probable remains of the 1811 perimeter wall and a further, stone and concrete, structure of 20th century date.

INTRODUCTION

Works have been ongoing at Perth Prison for several years to upgrade the facility to meet modern standards. Phase III is a continuation of this ongoing process, involving further demolitions and new build, and subject to a separate planning application.

The origins of the site go back to its use as a Napoleonic prisoner-of-war camp in the early 19th century; it was subsequently transformed into Scotland's first general prison in the 1840s and extended in the 1850s. The main prison block – containing elements of the original Robert Reid building of 1810-12, as well as Thomas Brown's work of 1839-42 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. The principal listed building affected by the Phase III works is the B-Listed Hospital block, which will be demolished and replaced by a car-parking area.

An archaeological desk-based assessment revealed that the site was originally constructed as a Napoleonic Prisoner of war camp in 1810-12 and was subsequently re-developed in the 1840's and 50's as Scotland's first general prison (Geddes 2005).

A number of listed buildings were identified on the site, several of which were scheduled for demolition subsequent to a scheme of historic building recording.

Archaeological excavations identified structural elements of the Napoleonic prisoner-of-war camp (1812) including the original enclosure wall and elements of a mid 19th century radial exercise or 'airing' yard. Tunnels, thought to be part of the ventilation system associated with the Victorian prison complex, were also revealed (Hatherley 2006).

The evaluation was recommended by the Perth and Kinross Area Archaeologist prior to the demolition and redevelopment of the category B-listed Hospital block and the adjacent estates yard. The trenching was targeted to identify the line of the

original 1811 prison wall and canal and if preserved, to record them archaeologically.

METHODOLOGY

The archaeological evaluation was carried out between the 4th and 6th February 2008. The primary objective was to identify and record any surviving remains of the original perimeter wall and its associated internal ditch, or 'canal'.



Plate 1

Dominoes and box made by French prisoners of war at the Depot, Perth

With the permission of Perth Museum and Art Gallery, Perth & Kinross Council

Scran Image 000-000-496-645-C

The Depot, a purpose built prison, was built at Perth during the Napoleonic Wars to house French Prisoners of War. Some prisoners spent part of their time making intricate objects of bone, straw or metal to sell to local people. The prisoners were allowed four hours of market daily and they had stands around the prison yards.

The first consignment of prisoners arrived at the Depot in Perth in 1812 in very poor condition. The Depot was a sizeable building, built to house 7,000 prisoners. There were numerous escape attempts. So many that the local newspaper refused to record them unless they were particularly unusual.

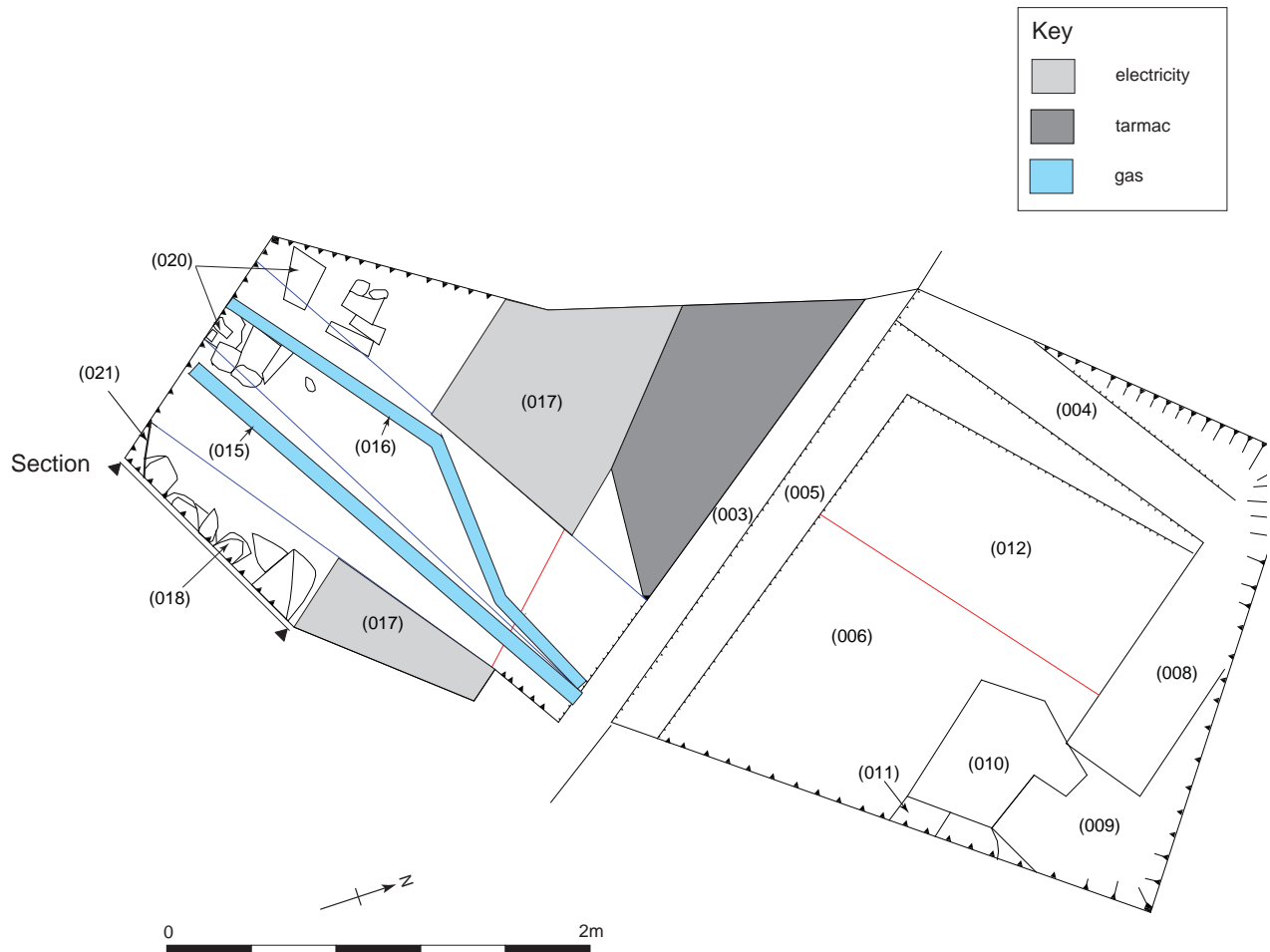


Figure 2
Trench Plan

A single trench measuring approximately 5m x 2.5m was excavated, using a wheeled mechanical excavator with a toothless ditching bucket, under the direct supervision of a suitably qualified archaeologist. Due to the restrictions imposed by the current security fence and extant structures associated with the Estates Yard, the trench was excavated at approximately 45° to the suggested line of the historic boundary.

Excavation was intended to proceed until either significant archaeological deposits or a clean subsoil surface was encountered. A maximum safe working depth of 1.2m was to be adhered to except in the case of machine excavated sondages where such were deemed necessary. Allowance was also made to widen and step trenches where unstable surface deposits were encountered. Where necessary a ladder was to be used to achieve safe access and egress.

All identified features were to be investigated and recorded. Features not suited to excavation in narrow trenches were only investigated in plan. All features exposed were to be sample excavated where possible. A sample excavation strategy of, 50% of discrete features, 25% of linear features with a non-uniform fill and 10% of linear features where a uniform fill is present, was established. No features were wholly excavated; similarly, structures and features worthy

of preservation were not unduly excavated.

All archaeological features were investigated and recorded at an appropriate scale. All stratigraphic units were assigned unique context numbers and described on a pro forma context sheets.

A full photographic record was kept, using colour transparency and black and white print film.

RESULTS

The archaeological evaluation revealed a roughly linear arrangement of unworked, unbonded, whinstone blocks (018), restricted to the south-western limits of the trench. No uniformity was observed in either their rough coursing or in shape or size. Whilst this possible structure was only distinctive in the north-west facing section of the trench, surviving to a width of 1.10m, a scatter of mixed brick and whinstone rubble was observed across the base of the trench on a similar alignment. The structure was heavily truncated by live services, running in two directions across the eastern half of the trench, which prevented further investigation. The structure was sealed by a maximum of 0.50m of modern overburden (001,002,019).

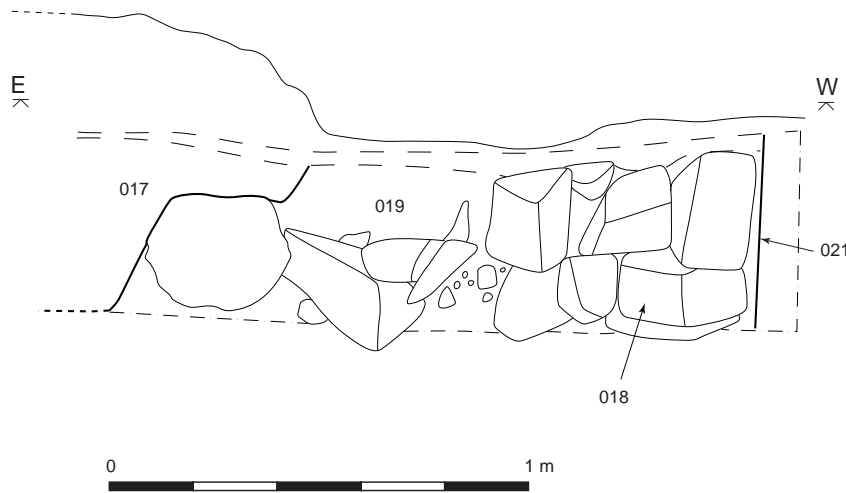


Figure 3
Section

The earliest deposit encountered in the eastern part of the trench comprised mottled grey and yellow clay including a moderate proportion of stone rubble (012). This was excavated to a depth of 0.50 m but not bottomed due to restrictions of space. Cut into this material were the foundations of at least two concrete founded, rendered, sandstone walls (003,004). One of which (003) effectively divided the eastern and western portions of the trench. Wall (004) abutted wall (003) toward the limit of its exposure to the north-west. At the north-eastern limit of the trench, wall (004) appeared to be associated with a roughly dressed sandstone slab, on the same alignment as wall (003). To the south-east of this was an arrangement of concrete and sandstone which appeared to be associated with red brick structure (007). This was visible to a depth of two courses and appeared to rest on a concrete foundation. Due to



Plate 2

Rubble core of 1811 perimeter wall

its alignment, it was only exposed in part of the section of the trench, where it was incorporated into wall (003). An iron lintel was observed in wall (003) at the point at which the two structures were apparently conjoined. The area over and between all of the features was sealed by a thick, yellow clay deposit

with coal and rubble flecking (006), which was then sealed by modern overburden associated with the Estates Yard.

DISCUSSION

The heavily truncated whinstone structure (018) identified at the south-western end of the trench was similar in nature and dimensions to that described in previous archaeological investigations, as the remains of the 1811 perimeter wall of the prison (Hatherley 2006). The structure appears to represent the remains of the rubble core of the wall, minus its dressed facing blocks. This interpretation is further supported by the position of the feature, directly reflecting the projected line of the former boundary. Whilst the trenching has allowed for the position of the former boundary wall to be established, it also suggests that the level of preservation of this section is quite poor.

The deep clay deposit (012), truncated by later structures, was thought to represent the possible upper infill deposit of the internal ditch or canal, associated with the primary phase of construction in 1811. This was recorded as being backfilled in 1842, when the site was transformed into the general prison. The extents of the deposit were unclear due to truncation and spatial constraints and no artefacts were recovered.

Sandstone wall (003) was identified as the probable remains of a section of wall shown on the 1947 plan of the site but absent from the previous plan of 1857. It appears that wall (003) formed a 90° angle with the surviving portion of the 1811 perimeter wall, which appears to have been demolished to its south-west.

Wall (004) was almost certainly contemporary with wall (003). Whilst it was constructed as an abutting structure as opposed to bonded into wall (003), the foundation and all other aspects of its construct

are virtually identical. If this interpretation is correct, it infers that the structural remains associated with wall (004) were constructed prior to the drawing up of the 1947 plan, with wall (003) as the only surviving aspect of the group.



Plate 3

20th century sandstone and concrete structures

The two course brick structure (007) was interpreted as the remains of a duct which passed through wall (003) by means of an aperture with an iron support lintel. It was thought likely that the duct was constructed to feed services through to the former Hospital block. Modern services, truncating the western portion of the trench, appeared to have been inserted into the structure.

All of the structures in the eastern portion of the trench were of 20th century date.

No further features, structures or deposits of archaeological significance were identified during the course of the evaluation.

REFERENCES

- Geddes, G 2005. *Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment at HMP Perth*, Headland Archaeology Unpublished Report.
- Hatherley, C 2006. *Archaeological Evaluation at HMP Perth*, Headland Archaeology Unpublished Report.
- Hatherley, C 2006. *HMP Perth Edinburgh Road Perth: Archaeological Excavation and Historic Building Recording*, Headland Archaeology Unpublished report.

APPENDIX 1: SITE REGISTERS

Context Register

Context	Description	Initials	Date
1	Gravel	HE	6/2/2008
2	Modern overburden	HE	6/2/2008
3	Modern wall running N-S	HE	6/2/2008
4	Small wall abutting [3]	HE	6/2/2008
5	Concrete foundations	HE	6/2/2008
6	Yellow-brown clay	HE	6/2/2008
7	Brick wall/duct	HE	6/2/2008
8	Stone slab	HE	6/2/2008
9	Stone slab	HE	6/2/2008
10	Stone slab	HE	6/2/2008
11	Concrete slab	HE	6/2/2008
12	Grey clay	HE	6/2/2008
13	Concrete foundation for brick duct [7]	HE	6/2/2008
14	Cut for foundation 5	HE	6/2/2008
15	Cut of gas pipe/fill of gas pipe	HE	6/2/2008
16	Cut of gas pipe	HE	6/2/2008
17	Cut/fill electric cable trench	HE	6/2/2008
18	Rubble core of wall	HE	6/2/2008
19	Yellow clay mix overlying wall core (18)	HE	6/2/2008
20	Rubble spread	HE	6/2/2008
21	Cut/fill water pipe main	HE	6/2/2008

Photographic register

Shot no.	Direction facing	Description	Initials	Date
1	-	ID Shot	HE	5/2/2008
2	W	General shot of trench with walls	HE	5/2/2008
3	E	E-facing section of trench showing services	HE	5/2/2008
4	SW	Sondage	HE	5/2/2008
5	S	Napoleonic POW camp wall	HE	5/2/2008
6	N	Wall [4]	HE	5/2/2008
7	W	Wall [3]	HE	5/2/2008
8	SW	General shot across site	HE	5/2/2008
9	NE	General shot across site	HE	5/2/2008
10	S	Brick duct [7] showing foundation [13]	HE	5/2/2008
11	E	W-facing side of wall [3]	HE	5/2/2008

Drawing register

Drawing no.	Section/Plan	Description	Initials	Date
1	Section	1:20 section through overburden by wall 003	KSB	02/02/2008
2	Plan	1:50 location plan of trench with detail	KSB	02/02/2008
3	Section	1:20 section of rubble wall	KSB	02/02/2008