

**NEW MEARNS ACADEMY SITE
LAURENCEKIRK
ABERDEENSHIRE**

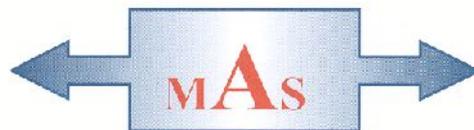


**Archaeological Evaluation
and
Excavation**

Carried out March-May 2012

by

Murray Archaeological Services Ltd



Report No: MAS 2012-9

by

H K Murray and J C Murray

H K Murray BA, PhD, MIFA, FSA Scot

J C Murray BA, MIFA, FSA Scot, FMA

Hill of Belnagoak, Methlick, Ellon, Aberdeenshire AB41 7JN

Telephone: (01651) 806394 e-mail: cmurray@btinternet.com

**NEW MEARNs ACADEMY SITE
LAURENCEKIRK
ABERDEENSHIRE**

-Archaeological Evaluation and Excavation-

H K Murray and J C Murray

1. Background

- 1.1 A Planning Application (APP/2011/2504) was granted permission for the erection a new Mearns Academy on a green field site at Laurencekirk, Aberdeenshire.

An archaeological condition was applied to this application in the context of Scottish Planning Policy (PAN 2/2011, SPP, SHEP).

The condition required that no development should take place before the implementation of a 7% archaeological evaluation.

- 1.2 Murray Archaeological Services Ltd was commissioned by Aberdeenshire Council to undertake the work.
- 1.3 The evaluation was undertaken between 19th and 22nd March 2012. This revealed an area of significant archaeology in one area at the SW end of the site and as a result of discussions with Aberdeenshire Council, it was decided to conduct a full excavation of this area.
- 1.4 The excavation was undertaken between 17th April and 3rd May 2012.

2. The Site

- 2.1 The site lay on the NE side of the village of Laurencekirk, Aberdeenshire between the A937 road and the Dundee to Aberdeen railway line. It was a green field site which had been part of Conveth Mains Farm.

Parish: Laurencekirk. NGR: NO 72130, 72075 (centre of evaluation site)
NGR: NO 71980, 71990 (centre of excavation).

- 2.2 The site is a relatively level field but there is a dip towards the SW corner and a gentle slope up towards the N. In all the evaluation trenches it was noticeable that for the 2/3rd of the field NE of the railway signal box the topsoil was shallower with the result that there were frequent modern plough lines in the top of the natural clay.

3 Methodology

- 3.1 In both the evaluation and excavation the cultivated topsoil was removed by a full slew excavator with a 2m wide toothless ditching bucket. Any possible features were cleaned and excavated by hand.
- 3.2 All features were planned, photographed (Appendix 1) and recorded (Appendix 2).
- 3.3 All mapping was done with a Magellan Mobile Mapper CX.

4. Historical Background

- 4.1 A desktop survey had not been part of the original brief. However, following the results of the excavation a basic background search of easily available map and archive material has been undertaken.

4.2 Map evidence

Roy's Military map 1747-55

Roy shows the settlement of Laurencekirk to the S of the Kirk Burn. The ground N of the burn, which includes the present site is shown as largely rig and furrow.

Spurryhillock (the earlier name of Conveth Mains) is shown.

William Garden. A Map of Kincardineshire. Surveyed 1774, published 1797

This also shows Spurryhillock and rig and furrow cultivation but with no additional detail.

1st Ordnance Survey Map. 1864 (published 1868)

Kincardine sheet xxiv.5 and sheet xxiv.1.

The area of the site is shown as improved cultivated lands within its present boundaries. The farm is shown in its present position as a large steading on 3 ½ sides of an open court. It is still called Spurryhillock (sic). A croft of the same name is shown within the boundary of the present site, to the S of the present farmhouse. It comprised two small rectangular buildings adjoining end to end. A small garden or yard lay between it and the road.

Ordnance survey 1901 (published 1904)

Kincardineshire sheet 024.14 and sheet 027.02

The steading of Spurryhillock farm has been filled in. The present farmhouse has been built. The croft remains. The land of the present site has been subdivided by a fence line probably corresponding to the second surviving field gate.

Ordnance survey 1923 (published 1925)

Kincardineshire sheet 024.14 and sheet 027.02

By 1923 the croft had been demolished. The farm and farmhouse remain but have been re-named Conveth Mains by a Mr Alexander who owned the farm prior to 1923 (pers. comm. Mike Robson).

4.3 General background

Laurencekirk was a planned town developed from 1765 by Francis, Lord Gardenstone as a weaving town. It became a burgh of barony in 1779. This replaced an earlier settlement. According to the 2nd statistical Account of 1834-45, the earlier settlement of Kirkton was on the Haulkerton Estate and was shown on Haulkerton estate plans as the Kirkton of Conveth. It is not known if this estate map still exists (pers.comm. Mike Robson).

More recently Geddes ((2001, 52) suggests that the original site was beside the original medieval church, which she suggest was on the site of the present church (built in 1804, replacing a church of 1626).

There are conflicting locations suggested for the medieval church. Fraser (1880) suggests the present church site but also refers to Chapel Knap to the NE, nearer to the Mill of Conveth. The 2nd Statistical Account refers to wall foundations having been excavated in the 19th century beside Chapel Knap. A rectilinear cropmark is known from air photographs and is marked on the Aberdeenshire SMR at 373579, 773365 as the supposed site of the Chapel of Conveth (SMR ref: NO77SW0004).

The church, dedicated to St Laurence, was dedicated by Bishop David in 1244 as a church under the prior of St Andrews. In c. 1275 this is referred to as the Kirk of Cuneuth (*sic*) (Fraser 1880).

A charter of King William I of Scotland (William the Lion) dated 1189 granted lands including 4 ploughgates in Conveth and ‘additional rights which a thain had had in kirkton of Conveth’ to Humphrey Berkeley (1/6/316. RRS, ii, no345). These lands were given in exchange for land owned by Humphrey’s wife Agatha, daughter of Walter de Berkeley at Ardoyne (1/6/315. RRS, ii, no 344).

In 1189 Humphrey granted peat and pasturage over these lands to Arbroath Abbey in return for masses (3/83/6. Arb.Lib.no 89). These grants were confirmed in 1242 by Richenda, Humphrey’s daughter and heir and her husband Robert son of Warnebald (4/20/33 BL Add MS 33245, fos 146v-147r and fo 151 r-v). Richenda as widow reconfirms the grants in 1245-46 (3/83/10. BL Add MS 33245. fo 149r-v), the grant is the subject of another charter in 1245 (3/83/11 BL Add MS 33245 fo 145 r-v) and ratified by Alexander II in 1246 (1/7/312 RRS, iii. No 277).

A further series of charters dated between 1238 and 1271 concern a half davoch of land in Conveth gifted by Robert son of Warnebald and Richenda to Roger Wyrfaute (or Wyrfauch) and which he granted to St Andrew’s Priory.

Although the exact locations of the granted lands can not be related to the excavated site, it is likely that it falls within the lands in question. The charters do emphasise the ownership and activity within the Conveth lands from the late 12th century to the end of the 13th century. They also give the strong impression that by this period this was well established and productive farmland.

5 Results of the Evaluation

Eight evaluation trenches were excavated, all running approximately NE/SW along the long axis of the site. An area near the S and W boundaries of the garden of Conveth Mains was excluded to avoid damage to a known service pipe

All mapping was done with a Magellan Mobile Mapper CX.

During the evaluation modern features such as a number of 20th century clay and stone field drains were identified and logged (Not shown on plan). However in this report only the archaeological features such as rig and furrow, occupation layers etc are catalogued.

Three types of feature were identified:

Remains of croft in trench 6

Rig and furrow in trenches 4-7

Medieval pottery was found in Trench 2 associated with a possible cobbled area and an occupation layer. Trenches 7 and 8 were excavated to find the limits of the medieval survival. As a result an excavation of the area was undertaken.

Trench 1

GPS NE end: 372227, 772245 SW end: 371933,771966

Orientation: NE/SW Length: 405m Width: 2.0m

Stratigraphy: Topsoil 300mm deep for most of trench overlay red clay natural.

Features:

At the SW end there was a dip in the natural with topsoil depths of up to 400mm.

A stone-filled sump in the extreme SW end of the trench (371941, 771975) appeared to be a recent feature, possibly to aid drainage in this dip. No associated artefacts.



Illus 1 Trench 2 looking N showing the medieval features



**Illus 2 Plan of evaluation trenches (red). Green area indicates the medieval finds in trench 2
Reproduce from Ordnance Survey digital map data, © Crown Copyright, All rights reserved. 2012.
Licence No 0100031673**

Trench 2

GPS NE end: 372242, 772235 SW end: 371948,771956

Orientation: NE/SW Length: 406m Width: 2.0m

Stratigraphy: Topsoil 300mm deep for most of trench overlay red clay natural

Features:

A spread of cobbles (excavation context 19) below c. 100mm grey fine clayey soil with charcoal and medieval pottery (excavation context 2). Cut by two modern clay drains. From 371983,771987 to 371973,771978. This area was subsequently fully excavated (see below).

Rig and furrow? Furrow NW/SE c.1m wide. 371964,771970

Rig and furrow? Furrow NW/SE c.1m wide. 371956,771962

Rig and furrow? Furrow NW/SE c.1m wide. 371952,771957

These appeared to be natural gravel spreads but they may represent gravel ploughed up by furrows. No artefacts related.

Trench 3

GPS NE end: 372258, 772220 SW end: 371965,771938

Orientation: NE/SW Length: 406m Width: 2.0m

Stratigraphy Topsoil 300mm deep for most of trench overlay red clay natural

Features:

Patch of charcoal c.10mm thick in shallow hollow c.1.2 x 1m+. This overlay almost sandy clay that had been stained grey from the charcoal. There were no artefacts and the charcoal may be modern; however it is in line with the medieval structure in trench 2 and could be medieval. 371992, 771965

Rig and furrow? Furrow NW/SE c.1m wide. 371989,771961

Trench 4

GPS NE end: 372269, 772201 SW end: 371982,771927

Orientation: NE/SW Length: 397m Width: 2.0m

Stratigraphy: Topsoil 300mm deep for most of trench overlay red clay natural.

Features:

Rig and furrow. Furrow NW/SE c.1m wide. 372036,771979

Rig and furrow. Furrow NW/SE c.1m wide. 372053,771995

Rig and furrow. Furrow NW/SE c.1.5-1.7m wide. 372072,772013

Rig and furrow. Furrow NW/SE c.1.5-1.7m wide. 372089,772029

Gravelly spread from 371991,771936 to 372004,771949 appeared to be natural deposit; patches of natural water-laid pebbles were common throughout the field and pebbles can be seen throughout the topsoil. A grey, slightly gritty silt from 372000,771944 above the gravel spread was superficially like the medieval occupation layer in trench 2. However

there was very rare charcoal and there were no finds associated. It appeared to be a remnant of the original subsoil.

Trench5

GPS NE end: 372239, 772131 SW end: 372005,771906

Orientation: NE/SW Length: 323m Width: 2.0m

Stratigraphy: Topsoil 300mm deep for most of trench overlay red clay natural.

Features:

Rig and furrow. Furrow NW/SE c.1.5-1.6m wide. 372039,771937

Rig and furrow. Furrow NW/SE c.1.5-1.6m wide. 372044,771942

Rig and furrow. Furrow NW/SE c.1.5-1.6m wide. 372050,771948

Rig and furrow. Furrow NW/SE c.1.5m wide. 372086,771983

Rig and furrow. Furrow NW/SE c.1.4m wide. 372097,771994

Gravelly spread from 372005,771906 to 372015,771917 appeared to be natural deposit.



Illus 3 General view of evaluation. looking N to Conveth Mains

Trench 6

GPS NE end: 372041, 771881 SW end: 372248,772111

Orientation: NE/SW Length: 312m Width: 2.0m

Stratigraphy: Topsoil 300mm deep for most of trench overlay red clay natural

Features:

Rig and furrow. Furrow NW/SE c.1.5m wide. 372085,771929

Rig and furrow. Furrow NW/SE c.1.5m wide. 372076,771919

Rig and furrow. Furrow NW/SE c.1.5m wide. 372074,771916

Rig and furrow. Furrow NW/SE c.1.5m wide. 372071,771913

Between the N end of trench at 372041, 771881 and 372230,772029 there was an area of disturbed rubble and topsoil below the plough soil. This is in the location of the croft named Spurreyhillock shown on the 1st OS map of 1864 and on the 2nd OS map of 1901. It had been demolished between 1901 and 1923.

Trench 7

GPS NE end: 372012, 771966 SW end: 371974,771934

Orientation: NE/SW Length: 50m Width: 2.0m

Stratigraphy: Topsoil 300mm deep at S end deepening of trench to c. 400mm; topsoil overlay red clay natural.

Features:

Rig and furrow. Furrow NW/SE c.1.5m wide. 372010,771963

Rig and furrow. Furrow NW/SE c.1.5m wide. 372004,771958

Rig and furrow. Furrow NW/SE c.1.5m wide. 371999,771995

Rig and furrow ? Furrow NW/SE c.1.5m wide. 371997,771952

Rig and furrow. Furrow NW/SE c.1.5m wide. 371992,771949

Trench 8

GPS NE end: 372005, 771983 SW end: 371969,771948

Orientation: NE/SW Length: 50m Width: 2.0m

Stratigraphy Topsoil 300mm deep for most of trench overlay red clay natural

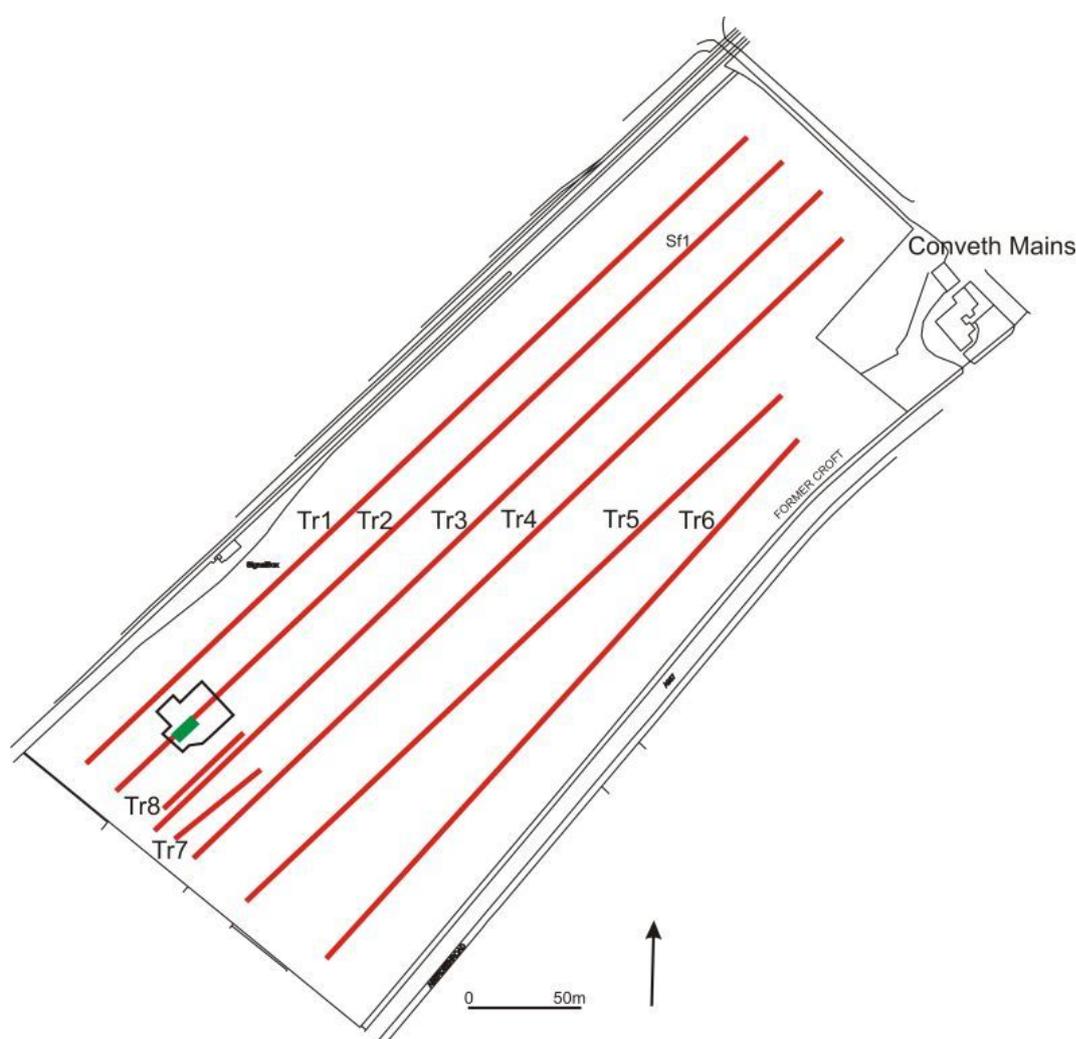
Features:

Thin gravelly spread from 371989,771969 to 371983,771962. This appeared to be a natural gravel spread but it may represent gravel ploughed up by furrows. No artefacts related.

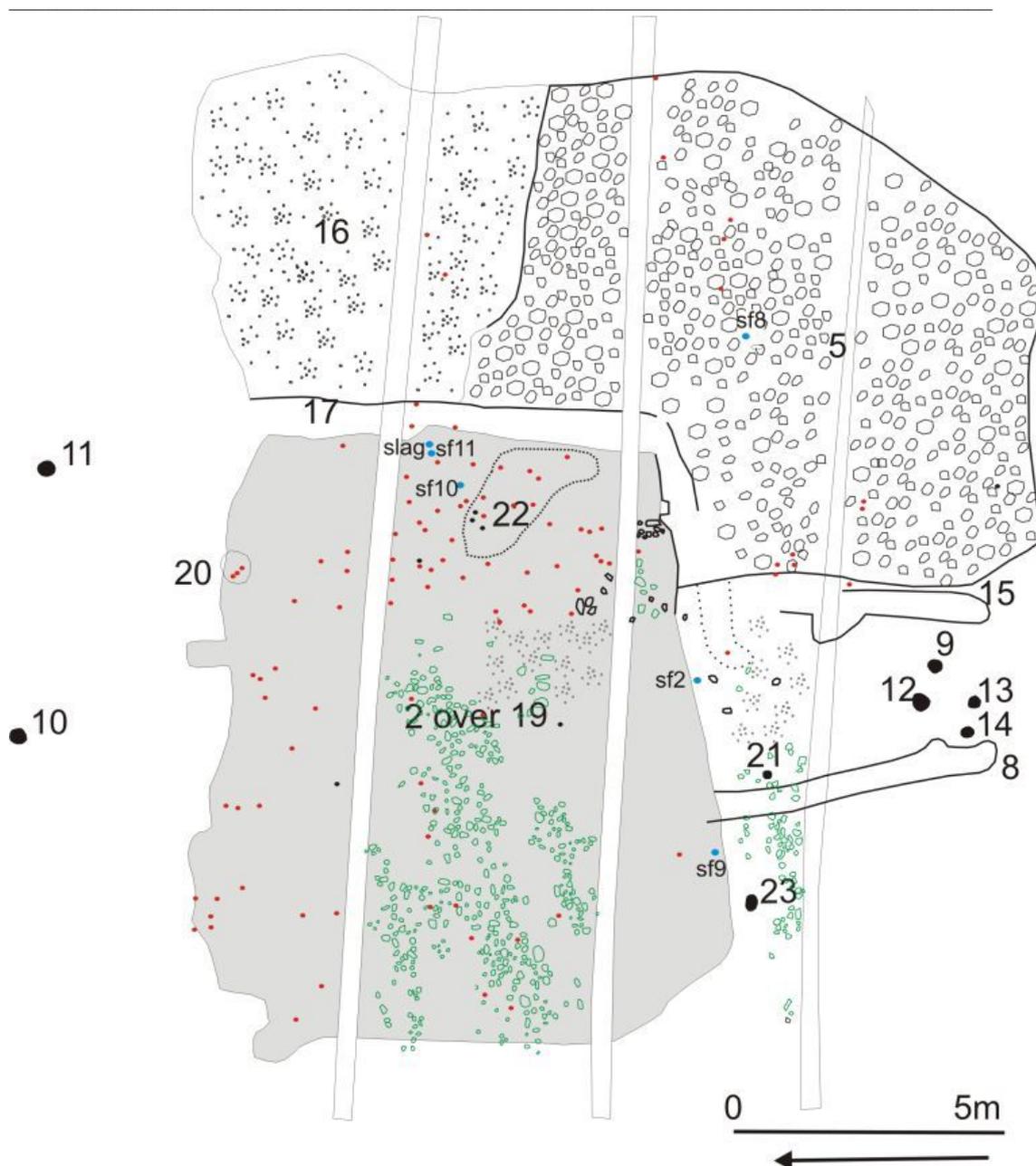
6 Results of the Excavation

An area 32 x 26m was opened up overlapping the medieval features found in evaluation Trench 2 (Illus 4, 15). The topsoil was removed with a full slew excavator with a toothless ditching bucket and all cleaning and excavation beyond that done by hand. Although the surviving medieval activity only extended to c 18 x 19m, the excavation was extended beyond it on all sides to ensure there were no isolated features. In fact the ground rose quite steeply to both N and E so features in both directions would be liable to have been ploughed away.

Details of all features are catalogued in Appendix 2 and sections of features drawn in illus 16.



Illus 4 Excavation (black outline) in relation to evaluation trenches. Reproduced from Ordnance Survey digital map data, © Crown Copyright, All rights reserved. 2012. Licence No 0100031673

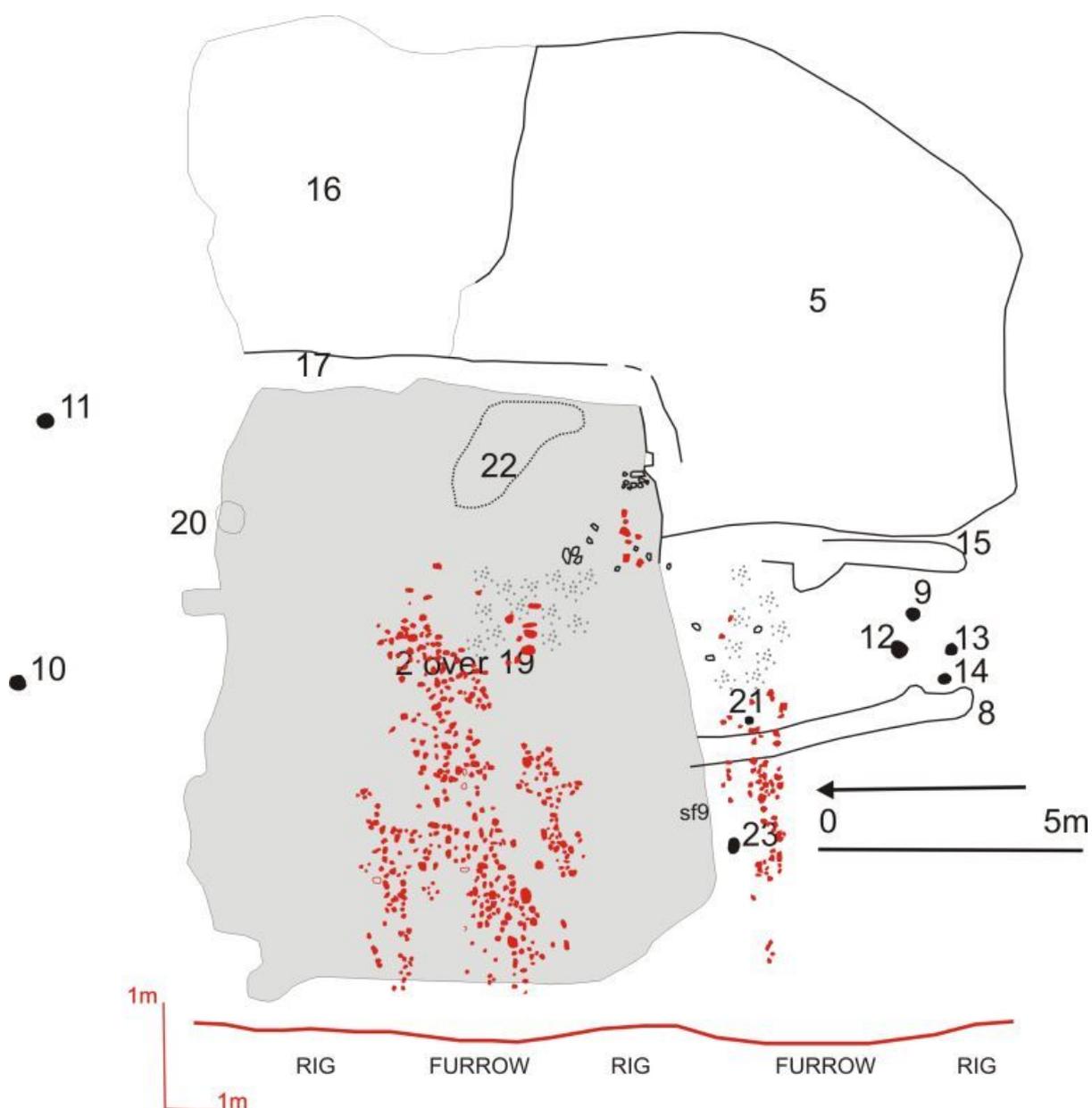


Illus 5 Plan of medieval features showing modern drains (white) cutting through them. Later medieval or post medieval rig and furrow (green) shows as lines of disturbed stones.

The excavation revealed part of the ground plan of a building with a cobbled yard to the E and SE and with a possible porch or annexe to the S. These features survived in a dip in the ground and it is possible that related features may once have existed and been ploughed away to both N and E where the ground rises quite quickly. The evaluation did not reveal any other definite medieval material or features elsewhere in the field. The remains had also been disturbed by a series of modern field drains running E/W across the site and by at least two furrows of rig and furrow cultivation running NW/SE across the site. These relate to the rig and furrow cultivation noted in evaluation trenches 4, 5, 6

and 7 (Illus 2). This cultivation could be of medieval date, post-dating the destruction of the building, or could be as late as or have continued until the late 18th/early 19th century agricultural improvements. Rig and furrow cultivation is shown in this area on both Roy's map of 1747-55 and Garden's map of 1774.

Although the furrows in the excavated area had dragged stones from the cobbles below the occupation floor, the piled earth of the rigs had provided some protection in other areas (Illus 6).



Illus 6 A series of levels taken across the W end of the site show the denuded rigs and the furrows in relation to the dragged stones on the site plan. Note the vertical scale of the section is 2x.



Illus 7 Looking SE across site. Ranging rods indicate the furrows of rig and furrow which have dragged stones. Grey of occupation floor visible between where protected by the rigs

The Building

Illus 9, 10, 14, 15 & 16.

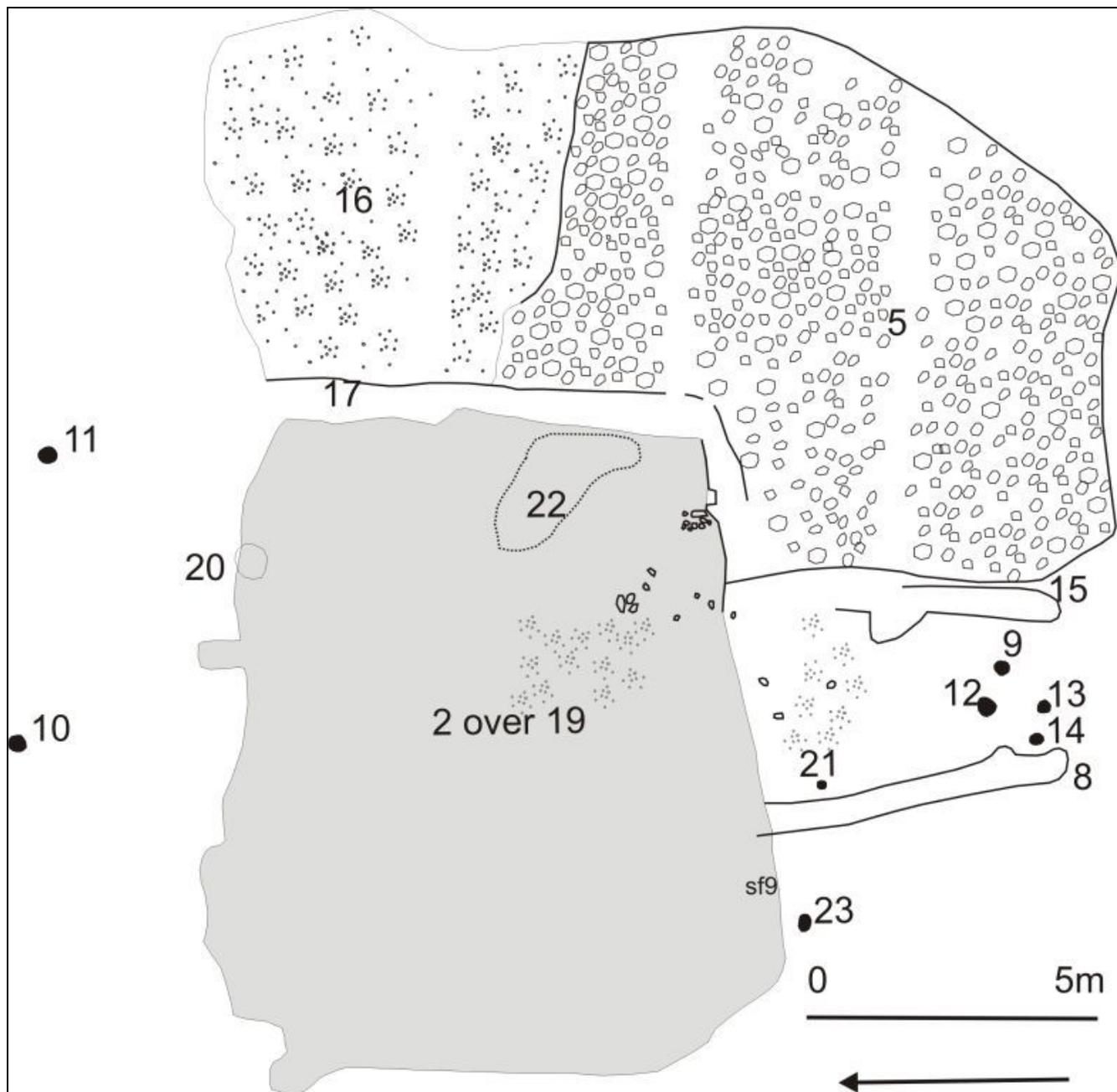
An area of occupation/floor deposit (context 2) extended c 11.2m E/W by between 8.5 and 9.9m N/S. This gives the minimum dimensions of the building. However if outlying post pits 10 and 11 were part of the structure, the building could have been c. 13m N/S and 11m E/W. This is possible as post pit 10 is on the long axis of the building and post pit 11 is in line with E wall. However there was no surviving evidence of an equivalent post pit to the W, or of related post pits on the S side of the building, although it must be stressed that these areas were highly ploughed away. Post pit 10 had a post-shadow indicating a substantial post up to 210mm in diameter, with stone packing to the S side, which would have stopped the base of the post moving inwards against pressure/roof pressure from the S.



Illus 8 Cobbles (19) below occupation floor

The occupation build-up context 2 lay on a stony/cobbled floor surface (context 19) which had been badly damaged in places by the later cultivation furrows(4, 7=18). 78% (95 of 121 sherds) of the medieval pottery was from the occupation deposit, almost all being small abraded pieces as might be expected where they had been trodden into a floor. There was some charcoal throughout the occupation deposit but there was an irregular patch, c 2m long, with a far greater concentration of charcoal including quite large lumps (context 22) which may indicate the position of a hearth or brazier. It is noticeable that there was a greater concentration of pottery and other finds including some tiny fragments of burnt bone from food waste in and around this possible hearth site.

The wall line (context 17) only survived on the E side and the SE corner. It showed as a band c. 550mm wide and up to 350mm deep from the top of the cobbles, between the edge of the cobbles and the edge of the occupation deposit. The most likely walling material would appear to be solid clay which would have been mixed with straw, heather or small stones as binding material. The sandy/clay with small stones through it (context 3) that lay above both the occupation layer (context 2) and the pebble yard (context 16) may have been the washed out and ploughed out debris of such walls.



Illus 9 Medieval features with later features removed.



Illus 10 Site looking W. Cobbles, foreground and LHS. Ranging rods outline SE corner of building. Stones in background dragged by rig and furrow cultivation

As late as the 18th and 19th century solid clay walls were common in this area of Kincardineshire, between Luthermuir, Fettercairn, Laurencekirk and Brechin (Walker, 1976, 54. Fenton and Walker, 1981), surviving examples being generally 300-400mm wide. Use of clay walling in medieval Scotland has been found in a rural context in a 14th century building excavated at Rattray, Aberdeenshire (Murray and Murray, 1993, 142) and in an urban context in combination with a wattle core at Perth High Street (Murray, 2010, 133-4, 189-191) and Skinnergate Perth (Perry 2003, 110-11). On the S side of the building there was a porch or annexe c. 5m long and narrowing from 3.25m wide at the main wall of the building, to 2.29m wide at its S end. This was delineated by wall slots (contexts 8 and 15) between 460 and 480mm wide and 100-130mm deep into the natural. These may also be the remains of the lines of clay walls or of clay on a wattle framework. A number of post-pits at the S end may include door posts or possible roof supports. Two of the posts (12, 14) had traces of stone packing on their N sides which suggests they were braced against pressure/roof pressure from the N. The area between these walls was partially floored by fine pebbles. Lacking any evidence for an entrance elsewhere, it is quite possible that this was an entry porch. Certainly an entry from the E would be unlikely as water would have drained down into

the house. The lack of cobbling or a pathway outside this feature may be an accident of survival as the ground rises again from this point.



Illus 11 Looking W across porch/annexe with sectioned wall slot 15 in foreground. Post pits 9, 12-14 in centre and wall slot 8 in front of ranging rod in the background

To the E and SE there was a cobbled (context 5) and pebbled yard (context 16) extending E up the slope. The water-worn pebbles and cobbles are of the type common in bands within the natural water-laid clays and were probably gathered from the adjacent area. Context 16 appeared to have been laid after context 5, possibly an extension of the yard within this potentially muddy ground. A compact trodden surface with some clay and charcoal fragments and a small number of very abraded sherds of pottery in it, lay over the cobbles (context 6).

The building is most likely to have been an ancillary building on a small manorial site. The lack of many excavations of comparable rural medieval sites makes parallels difficult. Medieval buildings in the burghs tended to be constricted within the narrow burgh rigs, with an average width of c. 4m, increasing size in the length from small buildings of some 7m to far larger buildings of up to 17m (Murray, 2010, 129). The only comparable sized buildings excavated on a rural manor in Scotland are 14th century ancillary buildings on the castle site at Rattray, Aberdeenshire, which were between 11 x

7m and 8 x 9m (Murray & Murray 1993, 133-5) which were associated with a larger hall building.

The size of the structure at Laurencekirk and the implication that the occupants had access to good long timbers for roofing as well as the labour to lay cobbled yards and floors indicates a degree of status and wealth not really indicated by the finds.

7 The Finds

Small Finds

All finds from the evaluation and excavation were catalogued (Appendix 3) and marked on plan (Illus 14). In addition a supervised metal-detectorist scanned the area around the excavation site- to c 20m from all edges of the excavation. Finds from this process were plotted by GPS (Illus 2) and are catalogued and described (Appendix 3).

Prehistoric

A flint blade (SF Cat 1) of early prehistoric date was found on the top of the plough soil to the E of the N end of evaluation Trench 1. A small flint chip (SF Cat 8) found in the trodden surface of the medieval cobbles may also be of prehistoric date but is likely to have been moved to its found location as part of the cobbling process.

Medieval

Only four small finds were in medieval contexts and none are diagnostic; they comprise two iron nails (SF Cat 10, 11) and two copper alloy fragments (SF Cat 2, 9), one almost certainly scrap metal. A further two finds from the metal detecting are possibly of medieval date- one being a scrap of sheet copper (SF Cat 3) - a common find on medieval sites as off-cuts from copper alloy tableware. The other- a small rivet (SF Cat 7) could be medieval or might be as late as 19th century, being the type of small rivet used to patch copper vessels or cooking pots.

20th century

Among the metal-detector finds from the plough soil there was a silver sixpence (SF Cat 5) of George V- the legend suggests this is from the period 1927-36 although the date is indecipherable. A small butterfly brooch (SF Cat 6) is also likely to be of 20th century date. Perhaps the most evocative of these 20th century finds is a 1915 'On War Service'

badge (SF Cat 4) with the individual number 82570 K. These badges were given to men and boys who were in vital industries to show that they were involved in the war effort and not shirking.

The Pottery

All pottery from the evaluation and excavation was catalogued (Appendix 4) and marked on plan (Illus 14). In all some 121 sherds and small fragments of pottery were recovered from 3 separate contexts on the excavation (contexts 2, 4 and 6). Almost without exception, all of the pottery was severely abraded making source identification very difficult. The exception to this was the small amount of N Yorkshire Scarborough-type ware which still retained its lustrous green glaze and seemed to be less abraded, although this might also be accounted for by the quality of the production of the ware itself.



Illus 12 Local Redware pottery from the occupation floor 2

While the bulk of the pottery was recovered from the build-up and occupation floor of the building (context 2), there was virtually no difference between this and the pottery from surfaces possibly external to the structure (context 6). Pottery from the furrow of rig and furrow cultivation (context 4) was probably derived from context 2 which the furrow ran through.

Form & Function

Even with the abrasion and the small and often fragmentary nature of the pottery, it seems almost certain that the predominant form was the jug. No cooking or other course storage vessels were evident.

Vessel Count

The degree of abrasion and the fragmentary nature of the material makes an estimate of the number of vessels present extremely difficult to estimate but it would be unlikely to exceed 10 to 15.

Decoration

With the exception of the highly decorated N Yorkshire ware, external green and occasional iron enriched glazes were evident on some of the body sherds. The incised wavy line decoration on the four sherds from Layer 2 may also be an English import.

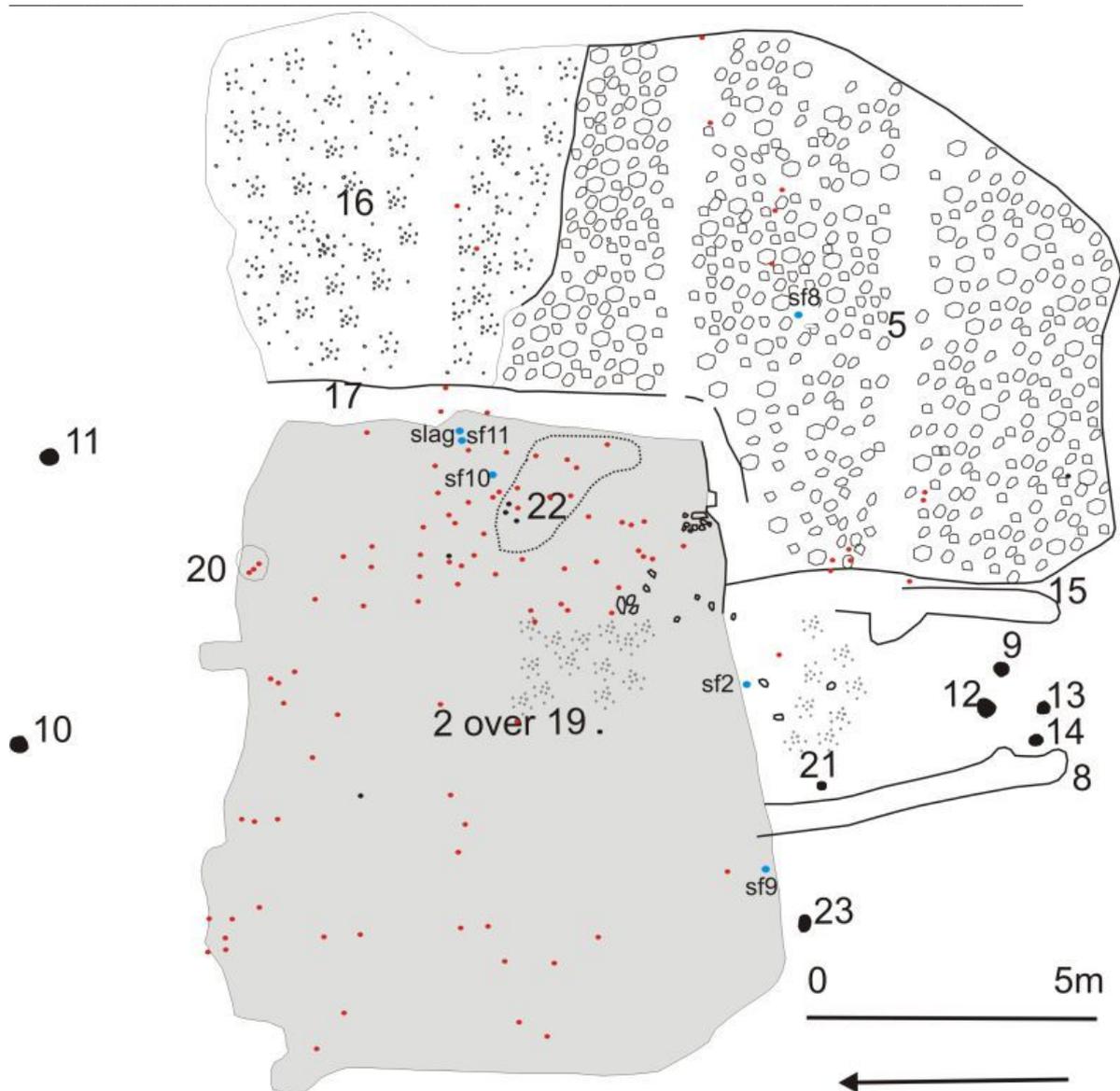
Source and Date

The pottery, overall, is a homogenous group with little variety in either fabric or form. The predominant fabric seems to be in the Scottish redware tradition with imported pottery from N Yorkshire (almost certainly a single vessel) and possibly one or more sherds of other northern English imports.

The assemblage is typical of others of late 13th/early 14th century date with no earlier or later pottery being in evidence- for example Brechin (Murray and Murray 2011) or, in a rural context, Rattray (Murray and Murray 1993).



Illus 13 N Yorkshire Scarborough type ware from occupation floor



Illus 14 Medieval features with finds. Pottery (red dots) and small finds (blue dots). Burnt bone (black dots)

Discussion of the finds

Both the pottery and small finds are of a range that might be expected in a small late 13th/early 14th century context. The Yorkshire pottery and the possible copper alloy vessel fragments suggest this was not an impoverished household, but equally there is nothing to indicate significant wealth. The quantity and range of finds also suggest a fairly short-lived occupation.

8 Discussion

Prehistoric

Apart from two flints, there was no other evidence of prehistoric activity from either the evaluation or the excavation; however there is evidence of prehistoric settlement in the general area and the marshes that had existed in the area would have been attractive for wildfowling and hunting.

Medieval

The archaeological evidence can be interpreted as the remains of a small, possibly quite short-lived medieval farm. The excavated building may be the only surviving remnant of a larger series of structures that have been ploughed out both by the medieval to late 18th century rig and furrow cultivation and by the post-Improvement cultivations of the 19th and 20th centuries. The evaluation did not indicate any other areas of surviving medieval activity or any further scatter of medieval pottery elsewhere on the site and it is possible that the farm/settlement may have extended either to the S where the Industrial Estate stands or to the W below the railway. Areas of gravel in trenches 4 and 5 appeared to be part of a natural ridge.

The excavated pottery suggests that this farm/settlement was active at the end of the 13th /beginning of the 14th century. The details of the structure and the presence of some imported pottery would indicate that this was a farm of some status, although not very wealthy. It may be identified with the property in the lands of Conveth which can be documented from the late 12th century when it was gifted to the de Berkeley (Barclay) family by King William I. Parts of this land were gifted by the Barclays to Arbroath Abbey in return for masses for their souls. Another part was gifted by them to a Roger Wyrfaut and by him to the St Andrew's Priory. Under these ownerships it is likely that a series of small tenanted farms and manors would have worked the ground.

The pottery and the lack of complexity in the stratigraphy suggest this building survived for a short period- possibly no more than 20 years or so. Whether the farm itself moved or whether the buildings were re-sited- possibly to higher, drier ground, is unknown.

The significance of this building is that it is one of the rare examples in Scotland of the excavation of a rural medieval building associated with a small, apparently unenclosed manor. It is also a rare example of a probable clay walled building of this date.

Late medieval to late 18th century

After the building fell into disuse the ground has been cultivated as rig and furrow. This may have begun as early as the later medieval period and is likely to have continued until the late 18th century. The map evidence shows the area cultivated as rig and furrow in the 18th century.

9 References

Fenton, A and Walker, B 1981 *The Rural Architecture of Scotland*. John Donald: Edinburgh.

Fraser, W R 1880 *History of the Parish and Burgh of Laurencekirk* . William Blackwood and Sons: Edinburgh and London.

Garden, W 1797 A Map of Kincardineshire 1774 on line at <http://www.nls.uk/maps>

Geddes, J 2001 *Deeside and the Mearns: an illustrated architectural guide*. Rutland Press: Edinburgh.

Murray, H K 2010 'The buildings', in Perry, D , Murray, H K and Beaumont James T, 2010 *Perth High Street: Archaeological Excavations 1975-1977*. Fascicule 1, Tayside and Fife Archaeological Committee: Perth, 127-198.

Murray H K & Murray J C 1993 'Excavations at Rattray, Aberdeenshire: A Scottish deserted burgh', *Medieval Archaeol* 37, 109-218.

Murray H K & Murray J C 2011 'Excavations at the Bishop's Palace, Brechin', *Tayside and Fife Archaeological Journal* 17, 37-57.

Perry, D 2003 'Camerons, Skinnergate, Perth', *Discovery and Excavation Scotland* 2003, 110-11.

POMS Paradox of Medieval Scotland 1093-1286 database of historical documentation and charters. www.poms.ac.uk

Roy. Military Map of 1747-55 on line at <http://www.nls.uk/maps>

Statistical Accounts of Scotland 1791-99 <http://stat-acc-scot.edina.ac.uk/link/1791-99/Kincardine/Laurencekirk/>

Statistical Accounts of Scotland 1834-45 <http://stat-acc-scot.edina.ac.uk/link/1834-45/Kincardine/Laurencekirk/>

Walker, B 1976 'Some Regional variations in building techniques in Angus, Fife and Perthshire' in *Building Construction in Scotland: Scottish Vernacular Buildings* Working Group: Edinburgh and Dundee, 52-64.

Acknowledgements

Murray Archaeological Services Ltd would like to thank Robert Cameron of Conveth Mains for his interest and help during the site work. We are also very grateful to Mike Robson for reading the section on the Historical Background and for comments regarding possible estate maps.

We are grateful to Diane Collinson, Jan Dunbar, Sheila Young, Sheila Duthie and Claire Christie for their hard work on site in truly horrible conditions!

Appendices

Appendix 1: Catalogue of digital photographic record (on CD)

Digital frame number	Content
Mearns Academy 1	
1-4	General excavation views
5	General view of excavation looking S
6-7	Excavating cobbles of yard
8-13	Looking SW showing site in slight dip in field
14-16	Using metal detector around site margins
17	Trowelling on cobbles. Tags indicate pottery find spots
18-19	Using metal detector around site margins
20-22	GPS logging metal-detected finds from plough soil around site
23-28	Context 7. To LHS of ranging rod plough marks at base of furrow visible as darker lines in yellow natural. Red flags indicate features to be excavated
29-33	Context 10. Section through post pit- shows packing on LHS
34-41	Excavating in wet conditions
Mearns Academy 2	
1-6	Baling and sponging site dry
7-21	View E towards road. Ranging rods outline the extent of building, cobbled yard at back. Stones in foreground dragged by rig and furrow. Occupation floor shows as greyer earth
22-24	Detail of stones in foreground dragged by rig and furrow
25-29	Detail S end building looking E
30-32	Looking S across the building. Occupation floor shows grey. Tags indicate find spots of pottery
Mearns Academy 3	
1-6	Site looking SW with cobbled yard in foreground. Occupation floor shows grey. Stones in background

	dragged by rig and furrow cultivation
7-8	Site looking S with cobbled yard LHS Occupation floor shows grey. Stones RHS dragged by rig and furrow cultivation
9-10	Site looking W. Cobbles, foreground and LHS. Ranging rods outline SE corner of building. Stones in background dragged by rig and furrow cultivation
11-14	Details of cobbled yard
15-20	Site looking W
21-22	Looking N across site to Conveth Mains. Grey of occupation floor clear. 'Porch/annexe' in foreground (red flags)
23-36	Looking SE across site. Ranging rods indicate the furrows of rig and furrow which have dragged stones. Grey of occupation floor visible between where protected by the rigs
37-54	Details of context 15 E wall of porch/annexe
55-60	Looking E across porch/annexe. Wall slots 8 and 15 show as dark lines. Post-pits between visible as dark circles in natural
61-67	Context 17 looking N. Line of E wall of building Clear (small ruler lies across it) between floor to LHS and cobbles to RHS
Mearns Academy 4	
1-5	Truck stuck in mud
6-7	Trowelling the occupation floor. Tags indicate pottery finds
8-13	Furrow 4 looking E. The disturbed stones removed
14-15	Looking NE across the building with disturbed stones of furrow removed
16-22	Looking SE across the site with disturbance of rig and furrow removed
23-27	Looking ESE across site. Building area outlined with 4 ranging rods. Porch/annexe shown LHS by two rods

28	Excavators
29	Looking SSE towards porch/annexe
30-31	Looking E across site. Building area outlined with 4 ranging rods.
32-35	Looking N across site towards Conveth Mains. Porch/annexe in foreground. . Building area outlined with 4 ranging rods in background
36-39	Looking E. Shorter ranging rod beside N end of wall slot 8. Longer rod alongside line of modern field drain cutting medieval features
Mearns Academy 5	
1-3	Looking N through porch/annexe
4-5	Looking NE. Porch/annexe in foreground. Cobbles 19 below occupation floor revealed in background. Cobbles of yard RHS
6-7	Looking W across porch/annexe
8-10	Looking N across porch/annexe
11	Looking N across site. Porch/annexe in foreground. Cobbled yard RHS. Cobbles below the occupation floor being excavated in centre background
12-13	Section of post-pit 9
14-15	Section post pit 12. Stone packing RHS
16-19	Sections features 13 and 14
20-24	Section feature 20
25-28	Small section (outlined by rulers) through cobbles 5
29-33	Section through wall slot 15
34-39	Looking W. Cobbled yard in foreground. Cobbles (19) below occupation floor behind (slightly greyer). Note modern drains by E/W ranging rods, cutting through medieval features
40-41	Looking NW across cobbles (19) below occupation floor (slightly greyer).
42	Oyster catcher nesting by site

43	Final recording and planning. Note planning tapes.
Mearns Academy pottery	
005	Scarborough ware from Yorkshire. Parts of jug. L13th/E 14 th Century
007	Sherds of handles and rims from Redware jugs made in E Scotland. Very worn and abraded
009	Body sherds from Redware jugs made in E Scotland. Very worn and abraded
Mearns Academy Evaluation	
0-3	Trench 1 looking S. No features. Topsoil c 300mm
4-5	Trench 2, context 11 looking N. This is part of cobbling and floor deposit later excavated
6-7	Detail of occupation deposit. Tags show medieval pottery finds
8-9	Trench 2, looking S across context 11
10	Looking N along Trench 2 across context 11. Shows ground rising to N of features
11	General view of evaluation trenches looking N to Conveth Mains
12-15	Detail of trench 2 section showing occupation floor (in excavation numbered 2) over sub floor cobbles (in excavation numbered 19)
16-17	Trench 3 looking N. Shows modern plough marks into natural
18-20	Detail natural in Trench 3
21-26	General views of evaluation trenches.

Appendix 2: Context data

Context No	Key word	Description	Finds	Interpretation
1	Topsoil	Topsoil. Grey /buff silty		

		clay. 300-400mm		
2	Layer	Blue/grey compact fine sandy silt. Frequent small charcoal flecks. <90mm	95 sherds pottery SF 2: Cu alloy frag SF 10,SF11: Fe nails	Occupation/floor
3	Layer	Mid brown sandy clay with some loose stones throughout. Over 2		Possible building debris
4	Furrow	Irregular E/W band of disturbed stones 3-3.5m wide .lying across 2.	11 sherds pottery	Furrow of rig and furrow. Stones pulled through from below 2. = 18
5	Surface/layer	Water-worn cobbles av 60-120mm. Close set. Limited by wall lines 15 and 17. Merges to pebbles 16		Yard surface?
6	Layer	V compact trodden surface among cobbles 5. Merges to 3. charcoal and clay frags through it.	15 sherds pottery	Trodden surface in yard
7	Furrow	=18. Irregular E/W band disturbed stones across S end of building with 4 plough marks (c. 70mm wide) visible cutting through top of 8 and natural		Furrow of rig and furrow. Stones pulled through from below 18=2
8	Wall slot?	Trench 460mm wide, 100mm max deep, 5.10m long. Fill dark brown/grey silty clay with moderate charcoal inclusions and some random waterworn pebbles		8 and 15 possible wall slots of porch/annexe. Patchy remnant gravel between 8 and 15
9	Post pit	Diam 230mm, depth 70mm. Fill fine grey gritty clay. No charcoal. Flattish base		Truncated post pit
10	Post pit	Diam 290mm, depth		Truncated post pit

		130mm. packing and backfill on S side. Poss post shadow 210mm diam Fill grey gritty clay.		
11	Post pit	Diam 200mm. Depth 140mm. Fill grey gritty clay.		Truncated post pit
12	Post pit	Diam 270. Depth < 230. Steep sides. Poss post shadow 140mm diam. V dark brown humic. Packing stone and backfill on N side included lumps redeposited natural		
13	Post pit?	Diam 210mm. Depth < 60mm. Fill dark grey brown some clay lumps		
14	Post pit	250 x 290mm. depth 150mm. steep sided. Packing on N side (14/2). Main fill dark brown humic 200mm diam		
15	Wall slot	W: 480mm. depth 130mm. 4.10m length- but probably originally c. 5m- N end disturbed by rig and furrow and possible burrow		15 and 8 outline possible porch/annexe
16	Pebbles	20-40mm pebbles with only occasional larger stones in a hard grey clay matrix form v hard compact surface. Some of 16 at edge of cobbles 5, suggesting 16 laid down after 5 and after wall 17 in position		Yard/floor
17	Wall line	N/S linear. Width c. 550mm. max depth 350mm. 'clear' area		Position of timber wall beam?

		between floor 2 and yard 16 & 5. Extended around SE corner yellow gritty sandy with some pebbles. Very distinctively clean.		
18	Furrow	=7	SF 9 Cu alloy. Base of furrow	
19	Sub floor	Stony surface below 2. Similar to cobbles 5 but below the occupation and bounded by 'wall lines'. Disturbed by furrows 4 & 18		
20	Post pit	600 x 620. depth 120. Fill as 2		
21	Post pit	Diam 150mm. depth 60mm. Fill grey charcoally as 2		
22	Charcoal patch	Irregular patch in 2 very rich in charcoal. Max dimension 2m x 2m. frags of burnt bone nearby		Possible position hearth/brazier
23	Post pit	Diam 200mm. Depth 160mm N side stone packing and redeposited clay backfill. S side 'post' brown humic 120mm diam		

Appendix 3: Catalogue of small finds

SF number	Description	Context	Possible date
1	Flint blade. L:30mm;W:11mm;Th:3mm	Top of plough soil GPS 372193,772199	Early prehistoric
2	Cu-alloy frag, poss scrap.May incorporate lead	2	Medieval

	L:20mm; W:15mm; Th:5mm		
3	Cu-alloy scrap.Frag cu-alloy sheet L:21mm; W:20mm; Th:1mm	Plough soil. Metal detected find. GPS 372025,772007	Possibly medieval vessel scrap
4	On War Service badge 1915. Reverse stamped 82570 K and manufacturer's name Woolley and Co (Birm) Ltd. Worn by men and boys in civilian jobs vital to war. To denote not shirkers	Plough soil. Metal detected find. GPS 372019,772008	1915
5	Coin. V worn. George V silver sixpence. Probably 1927-36	Plough soil. Metal detected find. GPS 371999, 772016	20 th century
6	Cu alloy butterfly with red enamel	Plough soil. Metal detected find. GPS 371992,772024	20 th century
7	Cu-alloy rivet and washer	Plough soil. Metal detected find. GPS 372008, 772035	
8	Flint chip	In 6. trodden surface over cobbles. Possibly imported to site with cobbles	
9	Cu-alloy frag-unidentifiable	Base of furrow 18. Possibly dragged from 2	Medieval-post-medieval
10	Fe nail	2	Medieval
11	Fe nail frag	2	Medieval

Appendix 4 Catalogue of the pottery

A total of 121 sherds (weight: c.775 g) and fragments were recovered from the excavation.

Layer 2:

Total number of sherds: 95

Weight: 545g

- 75 body sherds and fragments, very abraded, mixed red and beige sandy fabrics that appear mostly to be in the Scottish redware tradition. Some traces of external glaze was evident on some sherds.
- 1 jug rim with handle scar, reddish-beige fabric, very abraded.
- 1 jug rim with cordon and indications of a pinched spout. Fine fabric with beige surfaces and a dark grey core. Possible English import.
- 1 rim of small vessel, beige fabric with dark external glaze. Very abraded.
- 1 small everted rim fragment.
- 1 small round handle, possibly from pipkin.
- 2 strap handle pieces, one with light olive green glaze on red fabric with grey core. Very abraded
- 3 base sherds, one with thumb impression. Very abraded.
- 4 body sherds, grey coarse fabric with deeply incised line decoration on external surface with dark iron enriched glaze. Possibly English import.
- 7 sherds North Yorkshire Highly Decorated ware, Scarborough-Type ware. Two adjoining base sherds and five small body sherds, one decorated with nail impressed rouletting. Thick lustrous green glaze. Not as abraded as other material in the assemblage. The sherds are almost certainly from the same vessel.

Layer 4:

Total Number of sherds: 11

Weight: 120g

- 8 body sherds, very small and very abraded. Possibly Scottish redware.
- 1 sherd of strap handle of large jug. Reddish fabric, very abraded. No surviving glaze.

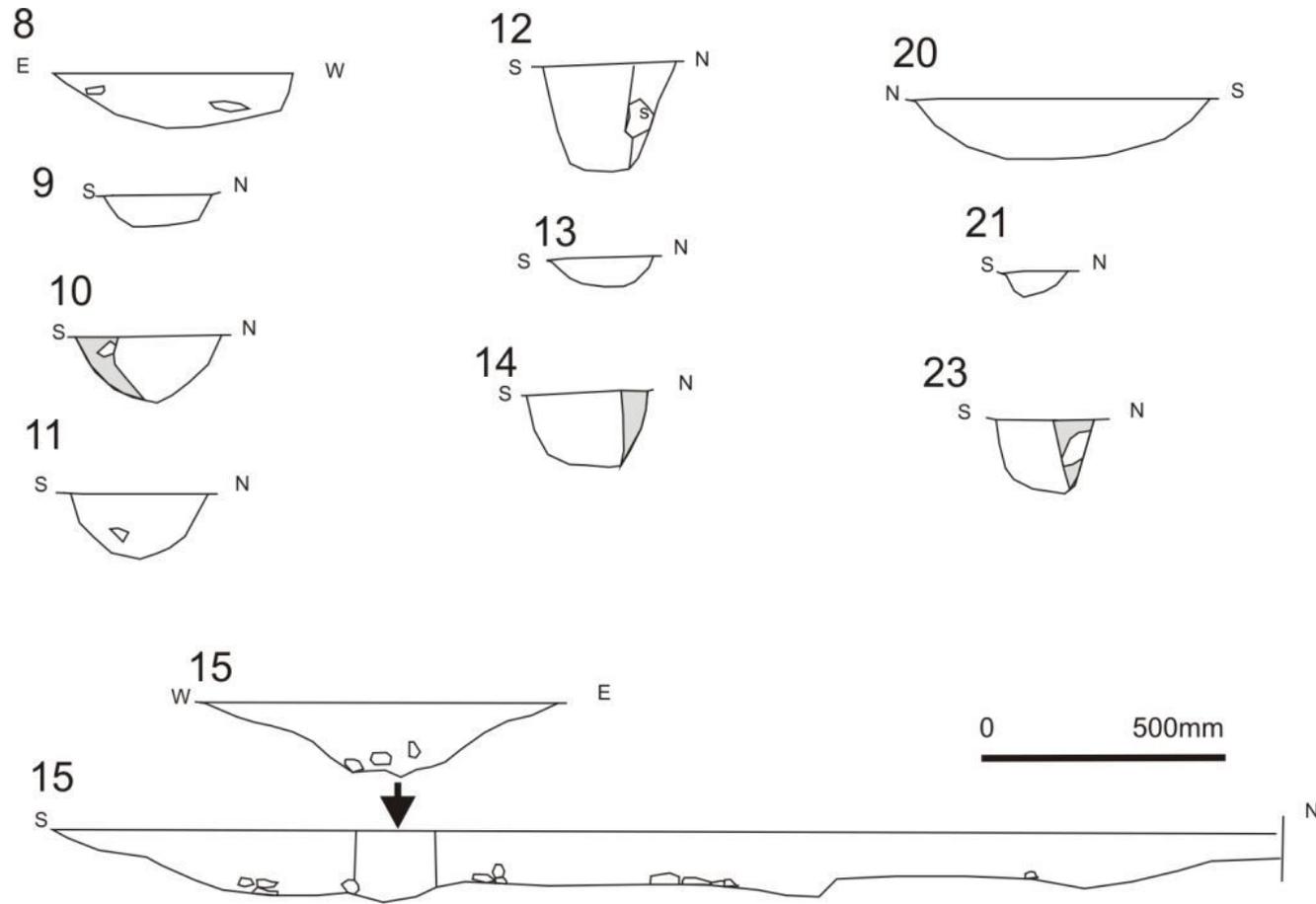
- 1 large body sherd. Reddish fabric with external olive green glaze with streaks of thicker darker green glaze. No t very abraded. Possibly English.
- 1 small body sherd, very fine reddish fabric with streaks of external iron enriched glaze.

Layer 6:

- 5 body sherds, mostly in Scottish redware tradition but very abraded. Only slight external green glaze surviving on one sherd.
- 1 sherd strap-handle. Scottish Redware with traces of iron enriched glaze.
- 3 very small rim fragments. Buff fabric on slightly grey core.
- 2 base sherds as above..
- 3 strap-handle fragments, two with perforations. Buff fabric, as above.



Illus 15 Medieval features in relation to site outline



Illus 16 Sections of medieval features