

King's Quarter, University of Aberdeen, AB24 3SW
Watching Brief
Site Code CA516



Moyra Simon

Cameron Archaeology

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Front: Odell Courtyard Garden: facing NE.

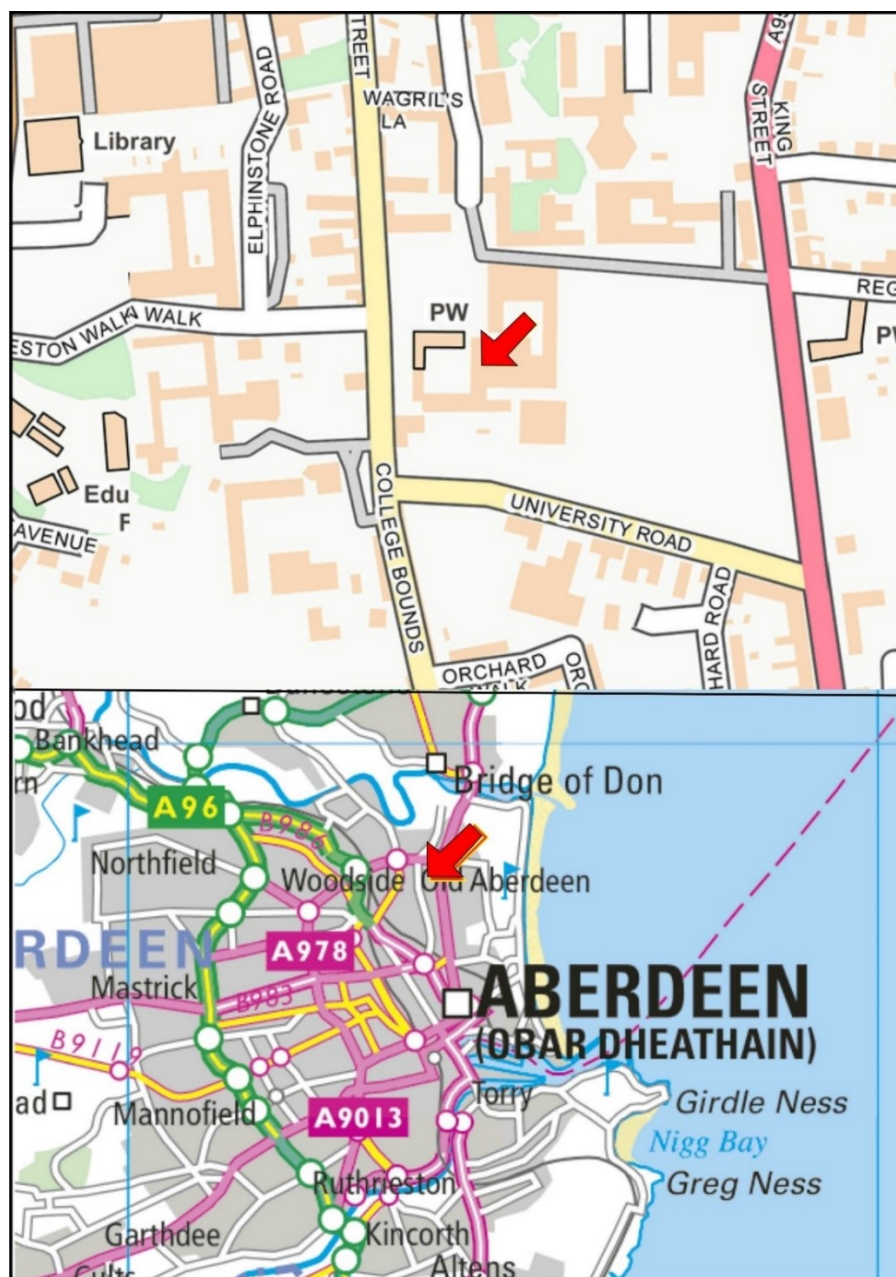
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SUMMARY

Cameron Archaeology carried out a watching brief groundbreaking works on 04-05 November 2021. Five test pits were dug against the walls of buildings surrounding the Odell Courtyard Garden, exposing their foundations. The initial excavation of two boreholes within the garden area was monitored. No archaeological features or artefacts were observed.

1 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The site (Illus 1) was located at King's College. It is centred on NGR NJ94002 08133, at 10-15m OD in the parish of Aberdeen.
- 1.2 The work was commissioned by University of Aberdeen. The work includes renovation of areas within King's College and the construction of an atrium within the North courtyard (O'Dell gardens). The Aberdeen City Council planning references are 201069/DPP for the detailed planning permission and 201070/LBC for the listed building consent.
- 1.3 All the archaeological work was carried out in the context of Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) Planning Advice Note (PAN 2/2011) and Historic Environment Policy Scotland (HEPS) which state that archaeological remains should be regarded as part of the environment to be protected and managed.



Illus 1 Location plan (Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2021)

2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The Historic Environment Record (HER) and Canmore (HES) were consulted online within 0.5km of the proposed development.

- 2.1 There are two Scheduled Monuments within 1km of the proposed development. St Machar's Cathedral and churchyard is named after St Machar, probably a legendary disciple of Columba. The legend goes that Columba instructed his pupil to evangelise the Picts of the north and to found his church at a river which crooked like the top of a bishop's crozier, or staff (see Cowan 1980; Fawcett 2002).
- 2.2 Scheduled Monument Tillydrone palisaded enclosure and cairn is on a prominent conical mound, formerly thought to be a motte, but which excavation showed to be much earlier, a defended site dating possibly to the Bronze Age, also to the 1st Century AD. There appears to have been no medieval occupation of the site. This artificial mound is located at the south end of Seaton Park, Old Aberdeen. The base of the mound is circa 30m in diameter, the summit flat and oval measuring circa 9m by 5m, and its stands between 5m and 7m high. It was originally a prehistoric burial cairn and was then reused in the 2nd century AD as a small defended fortlet. It is therefore not a medieval motte or castle mound as was assumed until excavations took place in 2001 and 2002 took place due to erosion of several tracks down the side of the monument. Two of these tracks were excavated as well as areas on the top of the mound and around the base following a geophysical survey of the area in 1999. The excavation revealed a large stone structure at the heart of the mound which appeared to delineate an area in the centre which was probably used for burials in the Bronze Age. Post-holes near the top of the mound on the north-east face contained a number of flint tools and a copper alloy ring, possibly part of a horse harness. In the 2nd century AD, a trench was dug a third of the way down the mound and a fence or wooden revetment was constructed within which a flat area probably housed a number of buildings. A hearth containing a fragment of samian pottery was excavated. On the south-east of the mound an entrance had allowed access into the fortlet through a gate. In the post-medieval period the height of the mound at been artificially raised using sterile sand and gravel, possibly to allow the mound to be used as a beacon or lookout. In the 19th century, an Ordnance Survey trig point stood on the top (Cameron 2002, 7).
- 2.3 Kings College includes King's College Chapel, quadrangle, library and Elphinstone Hall. King's College, named for King James IV, was founded in 1495, built about 1498 - 1505 and arranged around a quadrangle, The Chapel and Ivy Tower are the only original parts of this range to survive. The west frontage of the quadrangle is by John Smith 1825-6, comprising a 2-storey Tudor gothic building with an archway into the quadrangle. The south and east sides of the quadrangle and library were designed by Robert Matheson 1860-2 and 1870-3 with additions by WW Robertson 1881 and 1894, and in 1914 by A Marshall Mackenzie. The Ivy Tower dating from the 16th century and is 4-storey, rubble built now partly enclosed in the Mathieson Buildings. The Cromwell Tower was begun in 1657 (dated 1658), reconstructed by John Smith 1825-6 and is 4-5 storey (altered from 6 storey), rectangular in plan with a battlemented top. Inside is a 16th Century tall oak screen separating nave and choir. It contained confessional cubicles and a staircase led originally to the library. The blocked door high in the south wall of the choir indicates the original position of the screen. The ceiling is a shallow wooden vault. The Elphinstone Hall was designed by A Marshall Mackenzie and son 1927-9 with alterations and additions by G Bennet Mitchell 1956. It is in late Scots gothic style of ashlar, with a cloister feature. A wing connecting the Elphinstone Hall and the library is by G Bennet Mitchell, ashlar built in simple late medieval style. The

Chapel contains a war memorial window dedicated to Captain William Murison Smith Merson, 7th Battalion Gordon Highlanders, who was killed in action in November 1916. In front of the college stands a memorial to Bishop Elphinstone (NJ90NW1192), designed by Harry Wilson 1926, comprising a tomb chest with a recumbent bronze figure. A watching brief in 1990 in the Library building recorded a circular structure, probably a support structure. A watching brief was carried out by Aberdeen City Council Archaeological Unit in February 2002 on trial pits external to the chapel. A further watching brief was carried out by ACCAU in December 2002 on trial pits on the west side of the college for a soakaway. excavation in the Chapel in 2003 for foundations for the new organ revealed a burial dated 1030-1220 (SUERC-2975; GU-11670) and medieval jugs buried within the exterior of the W wall of the chapel (Cameron 2004, 8-9), NJ90NW0929 watching brief 2005 during works for floodlighting, NJ90NW0934 - watching brief; NJ90NW1018 - watching brief 1989 on trenches for floodlighting. A watching brief during conversion from University Library to Visitor and Conference Centre recorded no archaeological features. See NJ90NW0063 for cross incised stones built into the east end wall of the chapel (Aberdeen City SMR online).

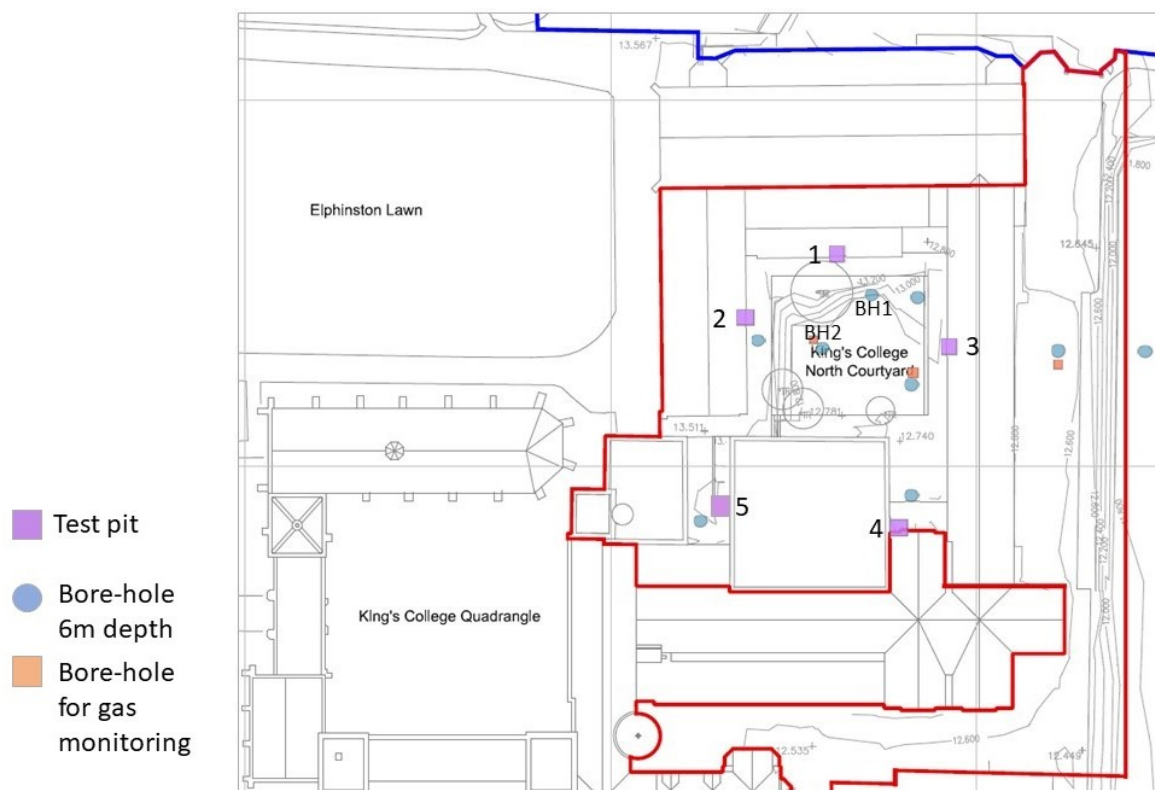
- 2.4 A watching brief was carried out in October 2004 during the installation of an electric cable through the lawn to the N of King's College Chapel. In a trench running between the High Street, Old Aberdeen and the Elphinstone Hall there was no evidence of any activity that might have been associated with the medieval frontage of the High Street - an area shown as garden ground on both Gordon's map of 1661 and the 1866-67 OS map of Aberdeen. In a second trench, running parallel to and E of the High Street to New King's Building, two walls and an area of flooring were uncovered, which are tentatively identified as relating to a 19th century professorial manse (Murray 2004, 8).
- 2.5 A research excavation was carried out, 16 March – 28 May 2017, with an HLF grant at the site of the Old Aberdeen Grammar School on the grass SW of King's College Chapel. Boys who planned to attend university had to attend several years of lessons at this school. Walls and cobbled surfaces were excavated which are probably the remains of the W wall of the school and doorway. Thousands of finds included slate pencils, clay pipes, window and bottle glass, much of which probably came from the school. Pottery dating from the medieval period to the 19th century was recovered as well as flints and other residual finds. Over 2000 people visited the dig and hundreds of local people, school pupils, scouts, guides and students took part on the dig (Cameron and Noble 2018, 9-10).
- 2.6 A watching brief was carried out by Cameron Archaeology in April - June 2014 during excavation of trenches for new lighting at the King's Pavilion. The west arm of the trench contained a lathe stone wall foundation, the remains of a boundary wall built in the second half of the 19th century. No other archaeological features or artefacts were recorded (Cameron 2015, 11).
- 2.7 Observation of a small development beside the Music Department of Aberdeen University proved negative (Murray 1982, 112).
- 2.8 A watching brief was undertaken on 1 August 2014 following topsoil stripping for the foundations of a new nursery in Meston Walk. No finds or features of archaeological significance were recorded (Murray 2015, 11).
- 2.9 Proposals for the building of a new library by the University of Aberdeen at the location of the current Queen Mother Library, required that an archaeological watching brief be carried out during pre-construction and main construction phases. Murray

Archaeological Services Ltd was commissioned by the University of Aberdeen to undertake the work. Archaeological observation of the new services phase was carried out between 11th February and 2nd March 2009 (Report No: MAS 2009-6A), while observation of the Main Contract was carried out between 14th – 26th August 2009. No original ground surfaces or topsoils were seen. Two possibly 19th century pits exist in section on the W edge of the site, with the lower levels of one, F1, still surviving in plan. (Murray and Harding 2009, 11).

- 2.10 In 1989 several small trenches were opened up during the installation of floodlights on the W front. The foundations of the 1832 frontage were exposed. A drainage channel was discovered running parallel to this frontage and was thought to be associated with its construction. At the front of the site was a cobbled area which may be of fairly recent date (Stone and Cameron 1989, 11).
- 2.11 Monitoring of trenches took place in August and September 2005 for the floodlighting of various University of Aberdeen buildings including King's College Chapel (NJ90NW 7 ; c 1500), New King's and Elphinstone Hall. The foundations of the chapel were recorded, including an X-shaped mason's mark on a sandstone block in the foundation of a buttress in the NE corner of the chapel. The foundations of the N wall of the chapel were 0.5-0.6m wide, whereas there was no foundation on the W side: the sandstone blocks were laid immediately onto the stone and gravel subsoil. A stone culvert was recorded adjacent to the W wall of the chapel; this was recorded in 1989 (DES 1989, 18) during a previous floodlighting scheme. One wall foundation was recorded in a trench in front of New King's; it was probably one of the walls of the brewery seen on the 1867 OS map (Cameron 2005).
- 2.12 A visual inspection of the site of a former public convenience was carried out on 4 April 2018 and a photographic survey was carried out on 20 April 2018 with watching briefs on the service trenches 30 August and 6 September 2018. A pit and post-hole were excavated; it is possible that post-hole base F1 is medieval in origin but the pit F3 was backfilled in the late 19th or 20th century. This site is on the line of medieval High Street and the buildings may have been wood or this might have been the remains of an internal partition or fitting. Parson Gordon's map of 1661 (Illus 11) shows stone buildings along the frontage with rigs to the E. Medieval pottery of the type recovered on this site have been found all over Aberdeen and Old Aberdeen. The building work is now complete and so it is recommended that no further archaeological work is required during the current planning application (Cameron 2019, 8).
- 2.13 Limited excavation took place in the garden S of 81 High Street, comprising two small trenches, was carried out by Aberdeen City in 1987 in the garden of a townhouse, recorded features dating from the 17th Century. The earliest evidence dated from the 17th century and consisted of ditches, a possible wall foundation trench and a cobbled yard. A small selection of clay pipes and pottery sherds were excavated from this site. There was no evidence that the site had been developed before the 17th century. The finds from this site are in the collections of Aberdeen Art Gallery and Museums (Cameron, Johnson and Stones 1996, 911-27).
- 2.14 A photographic survey was carried out by Cameron Archaeology prior to the start of this project.

3 WATCHING BRIEF

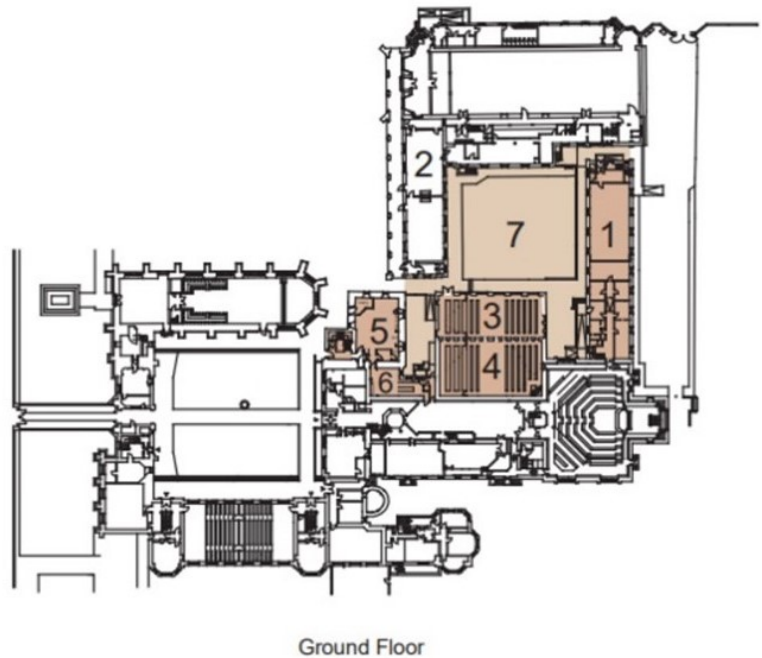
Moyra Simon of Cameron Archaeology carried out a watching brief over groundbreaking works on 04-05 November 2021. All test pits were hand dug except Test Pit 2 which was initially hand dug then extended by machine using a 0.2m wide flat blade bucket. Monitored bore-holes were initially hand dug to a depth of 1.2m before commencement of boring, to mitigate against disrupting undetected services (Illus 2).



Illus 2 Location of Test Pits 1-5 and Bore-hole (BH) 1 & 2 monitored during the watching brief (copyright Reich and Hall Architects).

Project Scope

- 1 Old Senate Wing
- 2 Linklater Rooms
- 3 Book Stack Extension
- 4 Original Book Stack
- 5 Cromwell Tower
- 6 Kitchen to James MacKay Hall
- 7 Odell Courtyard Garden



Illus 3 Plan indicating building names around development area (7) (copyright Reiach and Hall Architects).

3.1 Test Pit 1

Located against the S facing wall of the E wing extension of the Linklater Rooms (Illus 2 & 3). Test pit dimensions: 0.5m x 0.5m at the surface reduced to 0.5m E-W x 0.25m N-S, 0.66m deep, maximum depth 1.0m. At 0.66m the concrete (0.1m thick) foundation of the adjacent wall protruded 0.25m N-S into the test pit. The wall above was constructed from brick to ground level and stone above ground level (Illus 4). Few pieces of building material and a single sherd of 19th century pottery (Illus 5) were recovered from the dark brown loam fill. No archaeological features or artefacts.



Illus 4 S facing exposed wall showing stone above bricks on a concrete foundation in Test Pit 1: facing N.



Illus 5 Materials recovered from Test Pit 1; brick, slate, ceramic pipe fragments and 19th century decorated ceramic handle.

3.2 Test Pit 2

Located against the E facing wall of the Linklater Rooms (Illus 2 & 3). Test pit dimensions: initially 0.5m x 0.5m x 1.2m deep, extended by machine to 0.5m N-S x 1.5m E-W maximum depth 1.3m. Unlike the E wing observed in Test Pit 1, the foundation of the E facing wall of the Linklater Rooms were constructed from rough cut granite with a concrete foundation stepping out 0.25m E-W. The cut of the foundation trench for the Linklater Rooms building ran in line with the concrete foundation (Illus 6) which extended 0.23m E-W from the wall (0.2m thick). The foundation trench was cut through natural sand and was backfilled with dark brown loam containing building materials, glass and ceramic sherds (Illus 7). No archaeological features or artefacts.



Illus 6 N facing section of extended Test Pit 2 showing foundation trench cut through natural sand backfilled with dark loam visible above concrete foundation (right): facing S.



Illus 7 Selection of building materials (glazed brick, brick, slate, mortar), glass and ceramic sherds recovered from Test Pit 2.

3.3 Test Pit 3

Located against the W facing wall of the Old Senate Wing (Illus 2 & 3). Test pit dimensions: 0.64m N-S x 0.93m E-W, maximum depth 0.55m. A single paving slab was lifted to enable excavation of this test pit. The pit was filled with rubble, primarily of fragments of light yellow bricks with a white glazed outer surface (Illus 8). A cement surface extended across the full dimension of the base of test pit (Illus 9). It sloped slightly from E-W and was 0.5m below the surface immediately adjacent to the building, 0.55m deep 0.93m to W. No archaeological features or artefacts.



A.



B.

Illus 8 White glazed bricks recovered from Test Pit 3; lower brick (A.) shown in profile (B.).



Illus 9 Dark grey cement surface visible beneath rubble fill of Test Pit 3: facing N.

3.4 Test Pit 4

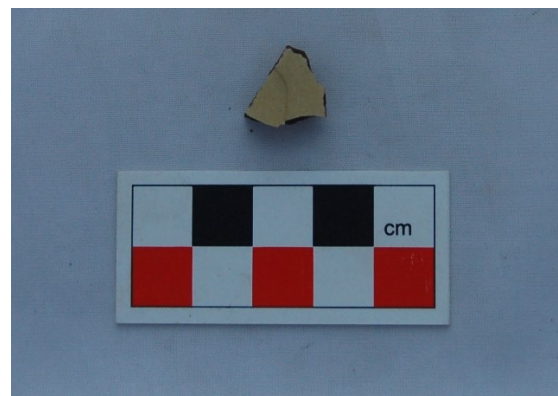
Located in the right angle between the Original Book Stack building and building extending eastwards (Illus 2 & 3). Test pit dimensions: 0.62m N-S x 0.45m E-W, maximum depth 0.89m. A single small paving slab was removed immediately adjacent to the walls of the buildings. The foundations were exposed at a depth of 0.64m (Illus 10) beneath a dark loam fill with few building materials and a single sherd of glazed 19th century pottery (Illus 11). No archaeological features or artefacts.



Illus 10 Test Pit 4 with exposed foundation: facing S.



A.



B.

Illus 11 Large brick (A.) and glazed pottery sherd (B.) recovered from Test Pit 4.

3.5 Test Pit 5

Located against the W facing wall of the Book Stack Extension (Illus 2 & 3). Test pit dimensions: 0.5m N-S x 0.6m E-W, maximum depth 1.12m. The foundation trench for the Book Stack extension was cut through natural sand and backfilled with dark brown loam above a 0.22m thick concrete foundation (0.66m depth) extending 0.25m W from the wall (Illus 12). No archaeological features or artefacts.



Illus 12 S facing section of Test Pit 5 with darker fill of foundation trench visible (right) in line with concrete foundation below: facing N.

3.6 Bore-holes 1 and 2

The initial hand digging of 2 bore-holes was observed during this watching brief. Holes approximately 0.25m x 0.25m, 1.2m deep were excavated in the lawn area of the Odell Courtyard Garden (Illus 2 & 3). Natural sand was exposed 0.3m below the surface. This was covered with dark loam and turf (Illus 13). A thin layer of ash material consistent with gardening activities, was located beneath the turf in Bore-hole 2 (Illus 14). No archaeological features or artefacts.



A.



B.

Illus 13 Bore-Hole 1 (A) and 2 (B): facing N.



Illus 14 Ash in the base of turf removed from Bore-hole 2.

4 CONCLUSIONS

Cameron Archaeology carried out a watching brief over groundbreaking works on 04-05 November 2021. Five test pits were dug against the walls of buildings surrounding the Odell Courtyard Garden, exposing their foundations. The initial excavation of two bore-holes within the garden area was monitored. No archaeological features or artefacts were observed.

5 ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks to Claire Akparanta, University of Aberdeen for initiating this project and the staff of Grampian Geotechnical who carried out the groundworks. Thanks also to Bruce Mann, Archaeology Service for Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire, Moray and Angus and Alison Cameron for their advice during this work.

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Cameron Archaeology
45 View Terrace
Aberdeen
AB25 2RS
01224 643020
07581 181057
cameronarch@btinternet.com
www.cameronarchaeology.com

Company registration no 372223 (Scotland)
VAT registration no 990 4373 00

APPENDIX 1 PHOTOGRAPHS

Photograph ID	Direction Facing	Comments
DSC_8627	N	Area before excavation of Test Pit 2.
DSC_8628	W	Area before excavation of Test Pit 3.
DSC_8629	S	Central area before drilling of bore holes.
DSC_8630	E	Central area before drilling of bore holes.
DSC_8631	NE	Central area before drilling of bore holes.
DSC_8632	SE	Central area before drilling of bore holes.
DSC_8633	N	Test Pit 1 showing stone above brick construction of adjacent building with concrete wall foundation at base.
DSC_8634	W	Test Pit 1 with concrete foundation wall foundation at base.
DSC_8635		VOID
DSC_8636	S	Test pit 2 with loose rubble fill above darker loam and clear foundation cut – natural sand to left, darker loam fill to right.
DSC_8637	S	Test pit 2 with loose rubble fill above darker loam and clear foundation trench cut – natural sand to left, darker loam fill to right.
DSC_8638	W	Test pit 2 with wall leading down to concrete wall foundation at base of pit.
DSC_8639	W	Test pit 2 with wall leading down to concrete wall foundation at base of pit.
DSC_8640	N	Test pit 2 with loose rubble fill above clear foundation trench cut – natural sand to right, darker loam fill to left.
DSC_8641	N	Test pit 2 with loose rubble fill above clear foundation trench cut – natural sand to right, darker loam fill to left.
DSC_8642	E	Rubble fill dug out of Test Pit 3 with distinct white glazed bricks.
DSC_8643	E	Test Pit 3 with dark grey concrete surface beneath rubble fill.
DSC_8644	N	Test Pit 3 with dark grey concrete surface beneath rubble fill.
DSC_8645	N	Test Pit 3 with dark grey concrete surface beneath rubble fill.

DSC_8646	n/a	Large brick from fill of Test Pit 4.
DSC_8647	n/a	Large brick from fill of Test Pit 4.
DSC_8648	n/a	Large brick from fill of Test Pit 4.
DSC_8649	S	Test Pit 4 with concrete wall foundation visible towards base.
DSC_8650	S	Test Pit 4 with concrete wall foundation visible towards base; with flash.
DSC_8651	E	Test Pit 4 with concrete foundation visible towards base.
DSC_8652	E	Test Pit 4 with concrete foundation visible towards base.
DSC_8653	E	Test Pit 5 with mid brown grit/ silt mix above concrete wall foundation.
DSC_8654	E	Test Pit 5 with mid brown grit/ silt mix above concrete wall foundation.
DSC_8655	N	Test Pit 5 with clear foundation trench cut – natural sand to left, darker fill to right.
DSC_8656	N	Bore-hole 1 hand dug to 1.2m prior to boring.
DSC_8657	SW	Bore-hole 1 with drill rig positioned prior to boring.
DSC_8658	S	N facing section of extended Test Pit 2.
DSC_8659	S	N facing section of extended Test Pit 2.
DSC_8660	W	E facing section of Test Pit 2 showing granite foundation of building.
DSC_8661	N	S facing section of extended Test Pit 2.
DSC_8662	n/a	Ash on the base of turf removed from Bore-hole 2.
DSC_8663	N	Bore-hole 2 hand dug to 1.2m.
DSC_8664		VOID
DSC_8665	N	Bore-hole 2 hand dug to 1.2m.
DSC_8698	n/a	Building materials and ceramic recovered from Test Pit 1.
DSC_8699	n/a	Building materials, glass and ceramic recovered from Test Pit 2.
DSC_8700	n/a	Ceramic recovered from Test Pit 4.
DSC_8701	n/a	Glazed bricks recovered from Test Pit 3.
DSC_8702	n/a	End view of curved glazed brick recovered from Test Pit 3.



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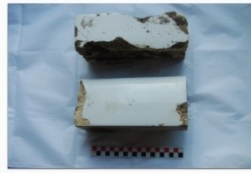
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