Digging Up Auld Ayr
An Excavation at 102-104 High Street
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AYRSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGICAL & NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY
1985

Printed by
Walker & Connell Ltd.,
Hartings Square, Darvel, Ayrshire.
During 1982 a small exploratory excavation was undertaken on a backland area of High Street, Ayr, at the former Butter Market Close, when that site was being cleared for British Home Stores Ltd.

This report describes the watching brief and excavations, the finds, and some significant discoveries:

1. The possible presence on an early church or chapel which may have ante-dated the creation of Ayr burgh in 1205;
2. Cultivation in this area, probably from the 13th till 15th centuries;
3. The site inundated with wind-blown sand in the 15th century;
4. A number of 15th or 16th century burials associated with the Franciscan friary which was established nearby in 1474;
5. Some evidence that that Franciscan friary was more resplendent than has hitherto been supposed.

Lengthy studies of the origin and development of Ayr have been made by Dunlop (1953), Dodd (1972) and Gourlay and Turner (1977). Here a brief outline is sufficient to set in context the 1982 archaeological investigation. The town grew up on the south bank of the River Ayr at the lowest crossing point and there was a castle and possibly an established settlement by the end of the 12th century. Ayr became a burgh in 1205 and quickly developed as a seaport and market town.

The earliest indication of an ecclesiastical presence in the burgh consists of a record of a chapter meeting held in Ayr in 1225. This is popularly believed to have taken place in the parish church of St. John but the building is not mentioned specifically until 1233. (Dillon, 1953,89)

Although Dominicans, black friars, arrived in Ayr about 1230, (Cowan and Easson, 1976, 116) it was not until 1474 that the burgesses are said to have invited the Franciscans to settle in the burgh. In 1481 the Pope agreed to their building a habitation with altars, a little belfry, cemetery, dormitory, refectory and other relevant buildings. (Dillon 1953, 100).

The friary survived till the Reformation and in 1567 William Campbell of Skeldoun was granted a nineteen year lease of one acre comprising the friary yards and was given authority
to recover possession of ‘the staines of the place, kirk and houses of the said Gray Freris quhairever the samyn may be apprehendit’. (Bryce, 1909, Vol 1., 357). Pagan, however, claims that the stones of the friary buildings lay as they had fallen till 1604 when they were used to build a hospital. (Pagan, 1897, 6). The site of the Franciscan Friary was chosen for the construction of a new parish church when the Cromwellian Citadel was erected over the original Church of St. John. Communion was first celebrated in this new church, the Auld Kirk of Ayr, in 1656.

THE SITE (fig. 1)

The plot where the excavation was carried out lies immediately to the north of the Auld Kirk and is shown on John Slezer’s 1693 drawing of the burgh as being undeveloped. From cartographic evidence it seems that, although ground immediately behind the High Street frontage was built-up by 1856, the east end continued to be building-free. By 1906 most of the plot had been covered with buildings.

The watching brief and small exploratory excavation were undertaken in the backland area to the north of the churchyard of the Auld Kirk, at the rear of 102 and 104 High Street and the the south of the old Corn Exchange and Butter-market. This site was part of a large area, 88-108 High Street, including most of the ground between the throughfare and the river, which was being redeveloped. A watching brief, carried out by A. Young and the author, showed that only behind 102-8 High Street were there archaeological deposits which survived to any significant depth. The rest of the area had been much disturbed by 19th century construction and 20th century demolition activities.

On the discovery of a truncated grave by A. Young, it was decided to undertake a small trial excavation along the northern limits of the surviving deposits to see if the grave could be related to datable archaeological layers and to determine whether large scale excavation would be worthwhile.

The area investigated, trench A, measured c. 3.40 x 2.30m and lay c. 12m north of the churchyard wall and c. 24m west of hoarding at the riverside wall. (NS 339 220). Excavation was carried out by a few volunteers and the writer during seven days in February 1982. The trench was dug by hand to a maximum depth of c. 1.90m when it became unsafe to continue further because of unstable sandy deposits. A second area to the west, trench B, was later investigated by A. Young in an attempt to confirm the nature of the deposits located in trench A.

Funding was provided by the Scottish Development Department (Ancient Monuments) and the site records will be housed in the National Monuments Record of Scotland, Melville Street, Edinburgh.

FIGURE 1:— Plan of Ayr and Site location, based on Ordnance Survey Map of 1855.

THE EXCAVATION

For the purpose of this report deposits have been divided into a series of five main phases which vary from single happenings to prolonged use to the site for specific purposes.
The earliest deposit reached, at a depth of c. 1.90m, was a layer of brown gravel and pebbles, 132, of unknown thickness, which was not fully excavated for reasons of safety but was seen, in the sides of a pit, to be in excess of 0.20m deep. The only finds from the layer were a few small rounded fragments of dark brown wood. In 1972, Mr. J. Hunter informs me, he encountered a similar deposit to the north of the site during trial trenching carried out in conjunction with recording the house of John Blair, the site of which is now occupied by the Marks and Spencer building. (see also Hunter, 1976). The 1982 deposit has been identified by Mr. R.D. Golightly as a river-mouth gravel. It is unfortunate that it did not prove to be feasible to excavate to a greater depth to find out whether layers of archaeological interest underlay the gravel and pebbles which could have been deposited during flooding.

PHASE 1A (fig. 2)

This phase consisted of two features, a dark brown sandy soil, variously numbered 130, 134 and 135, and a pit, 131. The soil layer was up to c. 0.30m deep and in places contained rounded pebbles disturbed from the layer beneath. There were a few slight linear impressions cut into the gravel layer below indicating that the soil had been cultivated. These shallow scores were not very distinct but they were seen to lie east to west. More conclusive evidence of cultivation was found in phase 1C.

It was not possible to differentiate between the phase 1A soil and the fill of a pit, 131, so the stratigraphical relationship between the two is not known, although the similarity of finds from them indicates that the pit could well have been cut through the soil. The pit was large, occupying most of the east half of the trench, and had almost vertical sides where it cut the gravel and pebbled layer. Its function was not ascertained.

Finds from the phase 1A features include iron nails and slag, fragmented human and animal bone and a few pottery sherds which range in date from perhaps the late 12th to the 15th century.

PHASE 1B (fig. 2)

Phase 1B was made up of a layer of fine reddish brown sand, 121 and 133, which extended over the whole area of trench A to a depth of c. 0.45m. It contained an even distribution of dark sandy soil lenses, 123, 125, 128 and 129, some of which were quite thick, c. 0.15m. The soft clean sand has been identified as having been wind-deposited and the darker earthy lenses probably derived from midden material dumped during the build-up of the sand layer. The presence of a few pieces of animal bone would appear to support such an interpretation. The use of midden material to stabilise wind-blown sand is known at a later date in Ayr, and Pagan refers to the inhabitants having to undertake this type of operation. (Pagan 1897, 71). These early attempts to the east of High Street did not meet with lasting success as will be seen in phase 2.

Only a few yards of medieval pottery were recovered from the phase 1B deposits.

PHASE 1C (fig. 2)

This phase was represented by a dark brown sandy soil, 120 and 122, which extended over the trench to depths between 0.20 and 0.30m, except where it had been cut away by a more recent feature. Three parallel linear impressions were found cutting into the phase 1B sand near the south side of the trench. The shallow grooves, which were roughly triangular in section, were up to 50mm deep and 90mm wide. They were c. 90mm apart and were aligned east to west as were the less distinct impressions of phase 1A. The symmetrical scores seem to have been created by the forward tearing action of an ard or harrow rather than the sideways turning movement of a plough.

The top c. 0.10m of the soil was much more compacted than the remainder of the layer and contained spreads and scatters of chippings from apparently unweathered faced sandstone blocks. The type of stone is similar to that used for decorated window mouldings found in a 19th century feature but is believed to derive from the Franciscan Friary. As some of the pottery found can only be of the 15th century date, it is almost certain that the stone chippings were deposited during the construction of the friary complex.
Other finds from the phase 1C cultivated soil are similar to those recovered from the phase 1A soil except that several pieces of painted window-glass likely to have been made in the 13th century, were also found.

DISCUSSIONS OF THE PHASE 1 DEPOSITS AND FINDS

Layers equivalent to the phase 1A-C ones in trench A did not exist elsewhere, either in nearby contractors's construction trenches or in trench B to the west, although a single soil horizon, up to 0.50m in depth, was present. Therefore, the wind-blown sand in trench A must represent an isolated bank rather than an extensive inundation. It is for this reason that these early layers have been notated phase 1A-C rather than phases 1-3. The finds recovered appear to corroborate such an interpretation.

It is not possible to state with certainty when cultivation of the soil horizon began because finds dating perhaps to the late 12th or 13th century were found in association with others, some of which can only be of a 15th century date. The earliest finds, pottery sherds, may merely have been disturbed from non-agricultural features during later cultivation or alternatively they may indicate that the area had been tilled prior to the burgh being established in the early 13th century. It could not be estimated from the small area excavated how regularly the soil had been cultivated between the late 12th and 15th century although the number of pottery sherds of later date perhaps presents hints that the ground was frequently manured and presumably tilled in the 15th century.

The high phosphorus and potassium contents of the soil, identified by Mr. Golightly, may indicate that large quantities of urban midden material were being used as manure during the medieval period although the presence of small fragments of human bone may have added to these levels. Indeed, Golightly has noted that the level of phosphorus was far in excess of that expected in normal present-day soils receiving high fertiliser inputs over many years.

The presence of some the fields in the phase 1 soil has raised a number of interesting questions which deserve some comment. The 13th century window-glass fragments almost certainly derive from a church building which pre-dates the foundation of the Franciscan friary immediately to the south. As the site of the nearest known 13th century church would have been that of the Dominican friary, c. 130m to the south, with the only other being the original parish church of St. John, c. 520m to the north-west, the glass fragments may indicate that an undocumented church or chapel had once occupied the site which was later to be used by the Franciscans. The fragments of human bone in the soil are likely to have been disturbed from graves, the presence of
which gives further evidence to the idea of an early ecclesiastical building in the vicinity. Although the glass is 13th century date it may represent window replacement or repair work on a structure which even pre-dates the founding of the burgh. Dodd has referred to the possible existence of an early church lying outwith the pre-burghal settlement but he was of the opinion that it would have been likely to lie on the site subsequently occupied by the medieval church of St. John (Dodd, 1972, 316). However, the site of the Franciscan friary must now be equally likely. It is even possible that the chapter meeting held in Ayr in 1225 could have been held here rather than in St. John’s as is commonly believed. With the construction of St. John’s Church during the first 33 years of the 13th century this other church or chapel could well have become redundant or at least subordinate to the parish church. Indeed, if only as an undocumented 13th century chapel foundation, it may have been subordinate throughout its existence.

It could be argued that the human bone fragments and the pieces of medieval glass were not in situ but had been brought to the site along with midden material to reclaim the area from enroaching wind-blown sands, but the number of glass fragments recovered would appear to be in excess of what might have been expected had this been the case.

**PHASE 2 (figs. 2 and 3)**

A layer of clean soft wind-blown sand, 119, sealed the phase 1 soil. Within trench A, it was deepest at the west, c. 0.80m, but was considerably shallower, c. 0.33m, at the east. In trench B it was seen to be 0.50m deep and in a contractor’s trench to the west it was c. 1m deep. Lenses of darker earthy material similar to those interpreted as being decayed midden material were also seen to be present in all three trenches. The sand layer also contained a few horizontal spreads of sandstone chippings, similar to those in the upper part of the phase 1C soil but no datable finds were recovered.

**DISCUSSION OF THE PHASE 2 SAND**

In spite of the attempts seen to have been made during phases 1B and 2 to stem the flood of wind-blown sand with the midden material the site appears to have been completely inundated to a significant depth by the end of phase 2, making it useless for cultivation. Therefore, it may not be surprising that it was this area of Ayr that was given to the Franciscans to establish their friary. In addition, the useless nature of the area explains why ground nearer the burgh centre was gifted to the Franciscan in the late 15th century than had been allocated to the Dominicans in the first half of the 13th century. The sandstone chippings show that construction work on the friary complex, started towards the end of phase 1C, continued during phase 2 while the sand accumulated.

From 17th century burgh records it has been calculated that the Franciscan lands comprised of some 3 acres 3 roods, a sizeable holding. (Bryce, 1909, Vol. 1, 357). All the land between the High Street frontage and the river from the south churchyard wall of the Auld Kirk to the south side of Gadgirth Vennel is likely to have been in their possession, assuming that they did not hold extensive property elsewhere in the town. Documents and a plan, said to define the extents of both the Dominican and Franciscan properties in Ayr, drawn up when the areas were gifted to the town by a chapter of Queen Mary in 1567, are believed to be in the custody of Kyle and Carrick District Council but these papers cannot be located.

**PHASE 3 (figs. 2 and 3)**

Parts of more than 20 graves and human skeletons were seen at various times during contractors’ earth moving operations but only one was excavated in trench A.

Bits of a skull were found and lifted from grave 118 by A. Young and the remainder of the skeleton was excavated by the writer with Mr Young’s assistance. The grave cut appeared to be subrectangular in plan although this is not certain as much of the north side had been cut away by a phase 5 feature. The grave was c. 1.75m long, east to west, and was in excess of 0.90m wide. Practically nothing of the sides remained but the base was seen to be relatively flat. The grave was c. 0.30m deep at the south but only survived to a depth of c. 0.10m along the north side. The fill was similar to the sand layer into which it had been cut but had a looser texture and was slightly darker in colour in some areas. Apart from the skeletal remains, the only other finds consisted of
two pieces of pottery, a fragment of an iron nail, a few sandstone chippings and a sheep/goat horn-core.

The grave was cut large enough to have taken a coffin, although the only indication of the presence of one was the nail fragment. However, it could have been of pegged construction which would have left no trace. No evidence was recovered to indicate if the body had been wrapped in a shroud.

Although the skeleton was seen to lie east to west with the head at the west end, bone preservation was poor. The sandy grave fill and the phase 2 sand, through which the grave had been cut, would have drained freely and leached the bone away. Only parts of the fragmented skull, the left femur, left tibia and fibula, together with some of the pelvis were removed relatively intact. It is possible that other parts of the skeleton had been disturbed in antiquity.

DISCUSSION OF THE PHASE 3 GRAVES

Because of its relationship to the earlier archaeological deposits and its location, the graveyard must be of the 15th century and later date and be associated with the Franciscan friary to the south. The cemetery was seen to extend from trench A, c. 0.10m to the south and the same distance to the east. The western limit was not verified and to the north it had been cut away during 19th century construction activities. All the graves were aligned east to west and none were seen to intercut, which would be compatible with a relatively short period of use of about a century. Most cut the phase 2 sand and, to the west of trench A, an overlying soil, so more than 1m of deposits overlying the excavated area are likely to have been removed during contractors' work on site. As nails and other iron objects were recovered from another grave investigated by A. Young, it is possible that coffins could have been used for burial in some instances. However, these iron objects are likely to be residual from the phase 1 soil through which the grave had been cut.

All skeletons were of adults lying supine with their heads at the west ends of graves. Both males and females are represented, which is not surprising as not only friars but the local population also would have been buried in the cemetery. Indeed, friars would probably have been interred with their heads at the east end of graves as was found during excavations carried out by the writer at the Linlithgow Carmelite Friary site in 1983-4. (Lindsay, forthcoming). A large percentage of some 200 skeletons found at Linlithgow were of children and babies but none was found at Ayr. This is unlikely to be significant as only a very small area of the cemetery was investigated.

PHASE 4 (fig. 3)

Only one small feature, 115, can be assigned to this phase. It consisted of a small truncated intrusion which cut phase 1 to 3 deposits and had been cut away to the north by a phase 5 feature so that only c. 0.30 x 0.25m survived. The fill consisted of brown soft sand but too little remained to permit the pit's function to be ascertained. This insignificant feature is only of interest because a few pieces of medieval window-glass were recovered from it.

PHASE 5 (figs. 2 and 3)

This phase consisted of a mortar-bonded wall, 113, and its foundation trench, 112. Lengths of the wall were located in both trenches A and B where they formed the north sides of the excavations. This feature is shown as a property boundary wall on the 1856 O.S. plan of Ayr, and bottle-glass finds from the foundation trench shows that the wall had
been constructed in the first half of the 19th century. A fine
and almost complete decorated stone from an ornate
traceried window was recovered from the foundation fill in
trench A. Several were found built into wall 113 in a
contractor’s trench to the west. Two different types of
mortar were present on the stones but neither respected
decorative mouldings so it would seem that either they had
been re-used on two separate occasions or that the wall into
which they had been built was subsequently repaired. Other
moulded stones were found later in 1982 during building
operations.

In his report, Dr. Stell has dated the style of decoration on
the stones to the late 15th century, which would be
compatible with the construction of the friary. The idea that
the Franciscans were poverty stricken is not borne out by the
ornate nature of the stonework and its quality indicates that
the friary buildings must have been much more resplendent
than some writers have believed (Dillon, 1953, 99-100). The
stone type is a sandstone which Dr. Collins believes could
have been obtained locally, perhaps from a quarry in the
Dalmellington area.

THE FINDS
Wm. Lindsay with contributions by D. Caldwell, M Spearman
and G. Stell

Although finds from the High Street, Ayr are few in number
compared with those from many other urban excavations, a
wide variety of interesting objects was recovered from the
small area investigated. Unless otherwise attributed the text is
the work of Wm. J. Lindsay. In the catalogue of illustrations
the description of each object is followed by details of the
trench, phase and context in which it was found.

THE POTTERY (fig. 4, No. 1-17)

In excess of 500 pottery sherds were recovered from the
excavations at High Street, Ayr. The majority, 446, were
recovered from phase 1 cultivated soil which contained
finds of a mid to late 13th century date. Only sherds from
this horizon have been studied in detail.

Most of the material appears to be of English or Scottish
manufacture and some of it was almost certainly made
locally. Probable continental imports consist of nineteen
sherds, sixteen of which are definitely French in origin. It is
regrettable that little can be said about vessel forms because
of the small number of sherds involved. Division of some of
the sherds into discrete fabric types, using a microscope at
× 20 magnification, proved to be problematic as some sherds
could be allocated to more than a single fabric grouping.
Initial sorting by eye was almost as effective in isolating
fabrics. It is almost certain that some of the seven High Street
types, as presented here, are sub-categories of wide-spectrum
fabrics.

FABRIC A (No. 1 to 4)

This is one of the smaller groups which is made up of 32
sherds from unglazed cooking pots. No jugs appear to have
been made in fabric A, which is soft, fine, slightly micaceous
and contains occasional sub-angular quartz grit up to 0.5mm
long. It is orange brown in colour but grey when reduced. An
off white, sometimes cream, wash of slip is present on
internal, external or both surfaces of many sherds. Little can
be said about the forms of vessels except that some sherds
appear to be parts of small rounded cooking pots, while the most complete example, No. 4, is larger and almost straight sided. But for the presence of soot and smoke blackening on many sherds, the size of some of the vessels might have been regarded as being suggestive that cups or other small containers were involved. The upright form of No. 4 is suggestive of a mid 13th century date although some of the finer rims, No. 1 to 3, could be earlier, perhaps late 12th century. The fabric is likely to have been made locally.

**FIGURE 4:** The Pottery, scale 1:4.

**FABRIC B (No. 5 to 9)**

Sixty-six sherds in this fabric were recovered from the phase 1 soil. Some difficulty was experienced in deciding whether certain sherds be included along with this grouping or with others. Sherds of fabric B are thin, hard and often orange or pale buff but grey when reduced. Inclusions consist of a few rounded quartz grits up to 0.5mm long. The main differences between fabric A and B are colour and hardness. Many of the sherds have a thin white wash of slip on either internal or external surfaces. A few of the sherds are likely to be from cooking pots of similar size to those in fabric A but most are from thin walled jugs which have orange or pale green glaze, sometimes with dark green speckling on external surfaces. Decoration consists of slipped vertical, sometimes notched, straight lines both in body colour and in brown. The quality of this material indicates that it could well be a 13th century English product.

**FABRIC C (No.10)**

This grouping consists of 33 sherds in a fairly hard coarse orange to pink fabric containing a large number of large quartz grits up to 1.5mm long. In addition, there are a few orange brown rounded inclusions up to 2mm long. Sherd cores are sometimes reduced grey. Ten sherds have white slip on internal surfaces and a few of these have some slip externally. Only a few sherds may be from cooking pots while the remainder appear to be from fairly thick walled jugs, up to 6mm thick. The coarseness of the fabric may have indicated that only vessels with comparatively thick walling could be thrown. Only a few sherds possess spots of clear or yellow glaze on internal surfaces. The apparent absence of large areas of glaze on jugs may be an indication that the fabric is early, perhaps 13th century, but the thickness of vessel walling suggests that some of the grouping could be 14th century date.

**FABRIC D (No.11 and 12)**

This is one of the larger groups of pottery with 80 sherds having been recovered from the phase 1 soil. Therefore, it is most likely that it was made near Ayr, at centres such as Potterhill where sherds of similar fabric have been found. The
fabric resembles many of the wares believed to have been locally produced throughout Scotland in the medieval and post-medieval periods. The orange fabric is harder than fabric A and contains frequent quartz grits up to 1mm long. Streaks of milky slip, present on a base sherd, do not appear to have been intentionally applied. All the fabric D sherds are from jugs with green external glaze. Notched vertical strips of clay decorate some sherds and a representation of a human face is present on a rim and neck sherd, No. 11. The group of material does not seem to have been made with the same care or degree of skill that characterises the pottery in fabrics A and B. Some of the sherds could be of a 14th century date but some thicker base sherds are more likely to have derived from 15th century vessels.

**FABRIC E (Not illustrated)**

Sherds in this fabric number 82. The hard grey reduced fabric contains a large number of rounded quartz grits up to 1mm long. All the sherds are from jugs which often have green glaze on external surfaces. Decoration, consisting of notched brown and body colour vertical lines is similar to that on fabric D material. Indeed, fabric E is almost certainly a reduced version of the locally produced fabric D. Much of it is likely to be of a late 14th century date, although somewhat crude knife trimming of a few thick bases indicates a 15th century date for manufacture.

**FABRIC F (Not illustrated)**

Only 28 hserds in fabric F were recovered from the phase 1 soil. In most respects it is similar to the grey reduced fabric pottery but it is finer and often has not been completely reduced. It is probably a 14th and 15th century product akin to, if not a sub-category of fabrics D and E.

**FABRIC G (No. 13 to 17)**

This is the largest fabric grouping with 106 sherds having been recovered. The fabric is very similar to white gritty wares that have been found during excavations carried out on the east coast of Scotland. To date, these have been regarded as eastern Scottish or north of England wares. At Ayr the quite coarse white, buff or pink hard fabric is sometimes reduced grey or black. There is a considerable variation in the size and frequency of rounded quartz grits which can be up to 1mm long. It was difficult to classify some of the finer examples because of their apparent similarity to fabric B material. Although it was not possible to determine how many sherds were from cooking pots, three smoke blackened rim sherds, No. 13 to 15, appear to be from vessels of this type. Jugs seem to be only patchily glazed with clear, yellow or light green glaze present on rims, necks, shoulders and handles, but little on the lower areas of vessels. Handles are of strap construction and one example has an additional thumbed central strip of clay. A few body sherds are decorated with vertical brown strips of clay and two have brown pads stamped with rosettes. One neck sherd has what is most likely to be a representation of a human arm.

Although much of the thin walled cooking pot material could well be of a 13th or early 14th century date most jugs are less well made and are probably products of the late 14th century. A few very thick basal angle sherds and a rim with stabbed decoration, No. 17, may be even later in date.

**THE FRENCH IMPORTS (Not illustrated)**

These products have not been divided into fabric groupings because of their distinctive characteristics and because of the small number of sherds involved. Sixteen sherds are definitely French and three others are likely to be of the same origin. Thirteen sherds from Saintonge green glazed jugs and a single sherd from a jug of Rouen type were recovered from the phase 1 soil. Both wares are known late 13th and early 14th century products. A single redeposited sherd in a hard white fabric with clear glaze is almost certainly from a French Polychrome jug and is one of the few finds from the phase 3 graves. A fragment of a bridge spout in a cream fabric with external amber glaze, which was also found in a phase 3 feature, is probably also a French import.

**DISCUSSION**

Little discussion of such a small group of fragmentary material is merited. Even though most of the sherds were recovered from a single sealed archaeological horizon, there can be little doubt that the material from the phase 1 cultivated soil dates from the 13th century or perhaps earlier,
to the late 15th century. Fortunately, there are sufficient indications within the assemblage to confirm this conclusion which is not always the case with material recovered from urban deposits. Because of the fragmentary nature of the material this report has, of necessity, had to be written primarily as a descriptive record but it does serve to illustrate the wealth of information which could be obtained, were large groups of material to be obtained from stratified deposits elsewhere in Ayr.

CATALOGUE OF ILLUSTRATED MATERIAL

2. Rim sherd of a cooking pot in fabric A. Trench B, phase 1, 015.
5. Rim of cooking pot or jug in fabric B. Trench B, phase 1, 020.
9. Rim of cooking pot or jug in fabric B. Trench B, phase 1, 010.

CLAY TILE AND DAUB (Not Illustrated)

Six pieces of flat tiles and two fragments of daub were recovered by A. Young during his excavation of trench B. The small pieces of tile are too tiny to say positively whether they are associated with roofing or flooring although they may have derived from the latter because of the amount of brown glaze on them. Unfortunately, true edges did not survive on the c. 15mm thick fragments. The fabric is orange, hard, smooth laminated and mica-free and could have been made locally. As the pieces were recovered from the phase 1 cultivated soil they could have come from the early chapel or church suggested earlier in this report. The two daub fragments contain the impressions of plant material and are typical of many medieval examples from throughout Scotland.

MEDIEVAL WINDOW GLASS (Fig. 5, No. 18-25)

Twelve fragments of c. 4mm thick, medieval window glass, quarries, were recovered from phase 1 and 4 horizons in trench A. Several conjoined to form larger pieces which had obviously been broken in antiquity, indicating that little disturbance of the two groups of material has occurred since their burial. External surfaces of the glass show no evidence of corrosion, weathering or staining from lead came, although most of the pieces, probably once clear and uncoloured, are now opaque and almost black. However, a decorated quarry, No. 20, was seen to be blue throughout its thickness when first excavated but is has since become totally opaque. Most examples show some evidence of having grozed edges but only one, No. 22, a quarry devoid of decoration,
survived intact. It was possible to reconstruct six pieces decorated with brown painted motifs which had been burned on to the glass.

The largest painted example, No. 18 which was recovered from the phase 1 soil, possesses cross-hatched grisaille decoration incorporating a stylised fleur-de-lys design which is typical of much English medieval glass of the 13th century. The writer has found similarly decorated quarries in Elgin, (Lindsay, forthcoming) while others have been recovered in recent years in Aberdeen and Perth (information from J. Stones and D. Hall). No. 19, though fragmentary, may also be of this style and date. No. 20 and 21, also recovered from the phase 1 soil, are likely to have been incorporated into a detailed and highly decorative window border also dating to this early period.

The small fragments, No. 23 and 24, possess traces of designs much larger in scale than No. 20 and 21 and are likely to have been made at a later date, perhaps the late 15th century as they are similar to more complete examples of this period which were recovered by the writer in Elgin and from the site of the Carmelite Friary, Linlithgow in 1983. (Lindsay, forthcoming). Such a date would appear to be compatible with the phase 4 feature from whence the two pieces of glass were recovered. Friar Strang of Aberdeen is known to have been responsible for the glazing of some of the Franciscan Friary windows at Ayr and the phase 4 glass fragments may have derived from his work, although this possibility cannot be proved. (Milne, 1911,83).

The architectural fragments from windows are described and discussed in G. Stell’s report.

CATALOGUE OF THE ILLUSTRATED MATERIAL

18. Part of an opaque quarry with a cross-hatched grisaille painted design including a fleur-de-lys motif. Trench A, Phase 1C, 120.

19. A fragment of an opaque quarry with possibly part of a painted leaf motif. Trench A, phase 1C, 120.


SLATE OBJECTS (Fig. 5, No. 26-28)

Thirteen fragments of worked slate were recovered during the excavation and watching brief. Five are discs between 22 and 50 mm in diameter, made from blue slate which Dr. G. Collins believes to be of Dalradian age, from either the Easdale or the Ballachulish slate belts. Two of the discs, No. 26 and 27, are much better finished than the others and have relatively smooth edges. Two were recovered from the phase 1 soil but the others were unstratified. There was no archaeological indication as to what function they may have served although they could be considered to be counters or rubbers. Other examples of this type of object have been found at medieval sites in Scotland such as the King Edward Street excavation in Perth. (Information from L. Blanchard). The remaining eight pieces of slate are fragments of roofing slabs, up to 9 mm thick, which may have originated in Arran, Bute, Cowal, or Kintyre. Some are likely to have been used to roof friary buildings.

CATALOGUE OF ILLUSTRATED MATERIAL

26. A small complete slate disc 1.5mm thick with a diameter of 25mm. Trench B, phase 1, 100.

27. A slate disc 5.5mm thick with a diameter of 50mm. Trench B, unstratified, 000.

28. Roughly shaped slate disc 4.5mm thick with a diameter between 26 and 32mm. Trench B, unstratified, 000.
Seventy-three fragmentary and complete iron objects were recovered during the excavation. Sixty-five were recovered from the phase 1 soil and many of the others were found in the fills of graves. As the phase 1 soil was tilled over a period probably in excess of 200 years and as the artefacts from the phase 3 grave-fills could easily have been redeposited from the earlier soil horizon, the objects are to all intents and purposes unstratified. For this reason only a small and typical selection from the soil horizon and from a grave is included in this report.

The objects have not been cleaned by X-ray radiographs show that most of the objects are nails which vary in length between 32 and 85 mm. Their shanks are roughly square or rectangular in section while their rounded or almost square heads are often nearly flat. However, several of the larger ones are slightly domed and many of the smallest complete nails have pronounced doming. This latter feature is likely to be decorative rather than functional.
37. A small, 32mm long, nail with a circular domed head 12mm in diameter. Trench B, phase 3, grave B, 201.
38. Part of a nail with a surviving length of 32mm. Trench B, phase 3, grave B, 201.
40. A 65mm long nail with a circular and rounded head 18mm in diameter. Trench B, phase 3, grave B, 201.

THE METAL WORKING DEBRIS (Not Illustrated)
R.M. Spearman

Sixteen pieces of metal-working debris were recovered from the phase 1 cultivated soil and a further two pieces from a later grave fill. All fragments were clearly residual and have therefore been treated as a single sample. The debris was examined visually and checked for magnetic attraction. Three groups of material were recognised but as the debris was residual no physical analysis was conducted. However, these three groups were similar to debris from other sites where analysis was thought worthwhile. (Spearman & Slater, 1983, 354-5).

A. Well baked clay with a glassy blue-black vitreous surface incorporating small visicles. The vitreous areas were slightly magnetic. Total weight 18g.: Furnace lining.

B. Concretions of unburnt pebbles, sand, iron hammerscales, and charcoal formed around either an iron object or fragment of bloom. Total weight 900g: Smithing debris.

C. Pieces of dull grey vitreous waste from bloom. These fragments were only slightly attracted to the magnet and were uncorroded. Total weight 700g.: Bloomworking debris.

All fragments are consistent with debris produced during the refining of iron blooms by smithing and the working of wrought iron. The smelting of ore is not suggested as there are no fragments of tap slag or related debris. This sample of debris is small and not associated with any structural evidence, but it would imply that smithing had been carried out in the vicinity of the site.

One small fragment of a clay mould was also recovered from the phase 1 cultivated soil. The piece is from the rim of a two-piece mould demonstrating the folded junction of the internal, core, and external, cope, portions of the mould. No details survived of the object being cast.

The assemblage of metal working debris is typical of medieval material often recovered from Scottish urban sites.

SILVER OBJECTS (Fig. 7 No. 41)
D. Caldwell

Two silver objects were found during the Ayr excavation. The first, a silver penny of Alexander III, was recovered from the phase 1 soil in trench B.

Alexander III, 2nd coinage 1d, reverse with four mullets of six points. Burns no. 13 (cf. fig. 151) (Not Illustrated).

The other silver object, a cast octagonal brooch, 33mm across, was unstratified in trench B. Alternate sides are flat on one face and ridged on the other. The flat faces have the following inscriptions:—

obverse:— +D/SSM/RNV/EDA(V)/V
reverse:— +AK/IVD/—

Some of the letters are badly formed and it is most likely that no sense was ever intended to be made of them. The pin, in silver of a poorer quality, has the normal barrel-sectioned head but lacks a prominent flange.

The brooch belongs to a small group of similar, silver octagonal brooches, thirteen of which, including this one, are known to the writer. The others are from secure Scottish provenances or are in Scottish collections, apart from one in private collection and two in the British Museum. If not a Scottish type it was evidently a popular one in Scotland.

Six in the collection of the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland have been described and illustrated by Callender (1924), including one found with a coin hoard in Ayr, deposited 1292 x 1360 (Callender, 1924, fig. 4, no. 2; Metcalf, 1977, no. 108). The closest parallel to the Ayr High Street example, however, is a similar sized brooch (unprovenanced) in the National Museum (Callender, 1924, lettering is very similar.)
A 14th century date is likely for the brooch on the evidence of its lettering and comparison with the other brooches described by Callender found with coin hoards.

ARCHITECTURAL FRAGMENTS (Fig. 8, no. 6 and 8)

G. Stell

The following architectural fragments were recovered during the excavation and were inspected when they were in store at Blackness Castle, West Lothian. Two other fragments subsequently came to light, but these have not been examined; from descriptions supplied by the excavator they appear to be part of a branched mullion of a traceried window and a slab window-sill.

According to information provided by G.H. Collins of the British Geological Survey, Edinburgh, the fragments are all of sandstone of Carboniferous age, probably emanating from the Dalmellington area of Ayrshire.

CATALOGUE

1. Not illustrated. Fragment of springer of traceried window arch with curved intrados and plain canted outer margin. Fillet-and-roll (almost ogival) moulding profile wrought front and back on chamfered plane. Multilated stump of tracery branch or cusp with deep square-section glazing-groove below, and shallower, slightly offset V-shaped incision above. Late 15th Century. Trench A, phase 5, 113.

2-4. Not illustrated. Three fragments of chamfered and roll-and-fillet moulded window cusping, comparable with the two different styles of cusping shown on the more complete fragments of window-tracery (eg. no. 8). Late 15th Century. Trench B, unstratified, 000.


6. Slightly curved branch mullion of a three-(or more) light traceried window comprising roll-and-fillet mouldings wrought on chamfered planes, front and back. Inner face has larger, possibly ogival, roll moulding, and its overall profile is thus comparable with the best-preserved fragment (no. 8). Deeply incised square-section glazing
grooves, including upper part of side panel. For the suggested context of this fragment see the accompanying drawing. **Late 15th Century.** Trench A, phase 5, 113.


8. Fine, almost complete fragment of circular window tracery, possibly forming part of a pattern of continuous circles (see accompanying drawing for suggested context.) Ogee and fillet moulding on outer face and smaller filleted roll on inner; corresponding faces of two surviving cusps wrought with a filleted roll and simple chamfer. A third cusp on the upper circle has been broken off. Deep square-section glazing grooves throughout, and two lightly incised masons’ marks on the beds of the upper joints. **Late 15th Century.** Trench A, phase 5, 112.

For the foundation of the Franciscan friary between 1488-1497 see Cowan and Easson, *Religious Houses*, 130-1, for the activities of Friar Strang (d. c. 1517) who was said to have been responsible for the design of the glass in the windows of the friary church, see Bryce, *Grey Friars* (1909), 1, 352 and Milne, *Aberdeen* (1911), 83.

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**CONCLUSIONS**

The results of the limited work undertaken behind 102-4 High Street have proved to be rewarding and have added to our knowledge of the medieval burgh obtained from earlier work within the town. (Gourlay and Turner, 1977). The 1982 watching brief and small-scale trial excavation have shown that archaeological deposits must survive in Ayr to considerable depths. In spite of the obvious difficulties of excavating highly unstable sand deposits to dangerous depths, much information about the origin and development of the town could be obtained from well-chosen areas of interest that have not yet been subjected to redevelopment.

**Acknowledgements**

The excavation was financed by the Scottish Development Department (Ancient Monuments) and was carried out under the auspices of the Urban Archaeology Unit. Permission to excavate was kindly given by Arrowcroft Ltd., London. A. Young assisted on site and was involved in much of the watching brief. I am indebted to D. Caldwell, M. Spearman and G. Stell for their specialist reports which have been included in this publication and to G. Collins of the British Geological Survey, R. Golightly and R. Longmore for their reports and notes on stone identification, soil analysis and the skeletal remains respectively. These papers are held in archive. I am grateful to R. Welander for undertaking X-ray radiograph examination of the iron objects and to my former colleagues of the Urban Archaeology Unit for their help and advice.

The excavation records, along with the specialist notes and reports, will be deposited in the National Monuments Record of Scotland, 54 Melville Street. Edinburgh.
REFERENCE LIST

Burns, E. 1877 The Coinage of Scotland, Edinburgh.
Milne, J. 1911 Aberdeen, Aberdeen.

This report has been published with the aid of a grant from the Scottish Development Department (Ancient Monuments).
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