

Report on Archaeological Trial Trenching at the site of Kinmylies Church, Inverness

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Historical background

The church at Kinmylies is first referred to in 1232 as part of a charter by Alexander II granting the Barony of Kinmylies to the Bishop of Moray (Fraser-Mackintosh, 1875, 9 & 25). This grant refers to an existing foundation as well as to "the house" of the archbishop, though this "house" may be no more than the residence of the priest in charge of services at the church. There are references to the Barony of Kinmylies up to the Reformation and particularly to the two settlements of Easter and Wester Kinmylies. These two "vills" lay well away from the site of the church, with Easter Kinmylies corresponding to the modern village of Clachnaharry and Wester Kinmylies lying adjacent to the burghal settlement west of the main burgh across the River Ness. It is therefore unlikely that there were many buildings in association with the church, though it has been suggested (Fraser-Mackintosh, 25) that because the original charter refers to the church as "prepositure" that it might have been a collegiate foundation and thus be a larger foundation than might otherwise be required. There is no indication that there was an earlier Culdee or early Christian occupation prior to the 13th century foundation, and there is no reference to the church at the Reformation - which may mean that it had already fallen out of use.

In the 19th century it is reported that workmen 'treching the grounds of Kinmylies House prior to laying out the gardens unearthed substantial stone walls and human remains' (Ordnance Survey Record cards). On the basis of this evidence, the church has been presumed to lie S of the present house at Kinmylies.

Introduction

Proposed redevelopment of the house and grounds at Kinmylies has led to an attempt to rediscover the site of the Medieval church. Initially this took the form of a geophysical survey carried out in September, 1987. The results of this produced no clear evidence as to the location or indeed the survival of the chapel though the position of several buried features was suggested. Prior to planning permission being granted, it was decided by the Highland Regional Archaeologist and HBM Inspectorate, Scotland that an assessment of the archaeological deposits should be carried out, and the writer was contracted to supervise this process.

Method

Due to limitations of time and fundung, only 3 days could be spent on site. In order to sample the site effectively, transects were cut by machine across the site. In total 300m of trench was excavated.

Results

The excavations failed to recover any evidence for the site of the church or indeed for any medieval settlement associated with this church. A few buried features were recorded and these are listed below.

The marked difference in soil resistivity recorded between the W and E sides of the site during the geophysical survey was explained by the varying depths of soil found on either side. On the E side the 0.2m thick topsoil lay directly over the gravel and sand subsoil whereas on the W the 0.3m thick topsoil of the garden lay above a further 1m of buried soils. This soil was traced over the subsoil to fill a natural hollow in the centre of the site draining to the S. Due to the undifferentiated nature and largely stone-free fill this grey/brown silt was interpreted as hill-wash. As the subsoil on this side was imperious to water the preceding few days heavy rain led to these trenches filling with water so that these deposits could not be fully examined (the subsequent falls of snow were not helpful either!)

The only possible archaeological feature noted on this side was (1) a possible wall line running N/S one stone thick and c.0.3m wide. The slight nature of this rather nebulous feature showed that if it was a wall it was not structural. A substantial stone-lined drain (2) was recorded to the N of this running out of a modern stone dyke that formed the western edge of the site. This drain was still active and its course reflected the modern terracing of the garden. Also modern brick and slate fragments lay immediately above the capstones. It was therefore considered a recent feature and not of archaeological significance.

On the E side various features (3)-(7) were recorded cut into the subsoil. None of these could be considered to be of any antiquity as they contained modern soil and in some cases modern porcelains and bottle glass, indeed no. (3) included the remnants of a fence post. Apart from feature (6), they were interpreted as drains contemporary with the Victorian and later gardens. (6) was nearly 4m wide and at least 1m deep, possibly much more, being filled with loose stone rubble. When it was examined it was thought it might have been the site of a well. This theory was possibly confirmed by a local informant who used to work in the gardens and who reported that there used to be a well 50 to 60 feet from the back wall of the house. He also reported that he was instructed to fill in this well with the stones from the church. This was at least 20 years ago and probably much earlier. How much credence it is possible to give to this report is difficult to tell.

Assessment

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As no medieval artifacts and no medieval deposits were recorded the site of the church could not be found. There are two possible explanations for this. Either the location of the trenches, which only represent a 1/16th sample of the site failed to cover the position of the church or the church had already been destroyed during the construction of the gardens (or perhaps when this possible well was filled in). If remains of the church do survive elsewhere on the site it is unlikely that there will be much stratigraphic material, such as floor levels surviving in association. That said it would still be worthwhile examining the

site again once the topsoil has been removed.

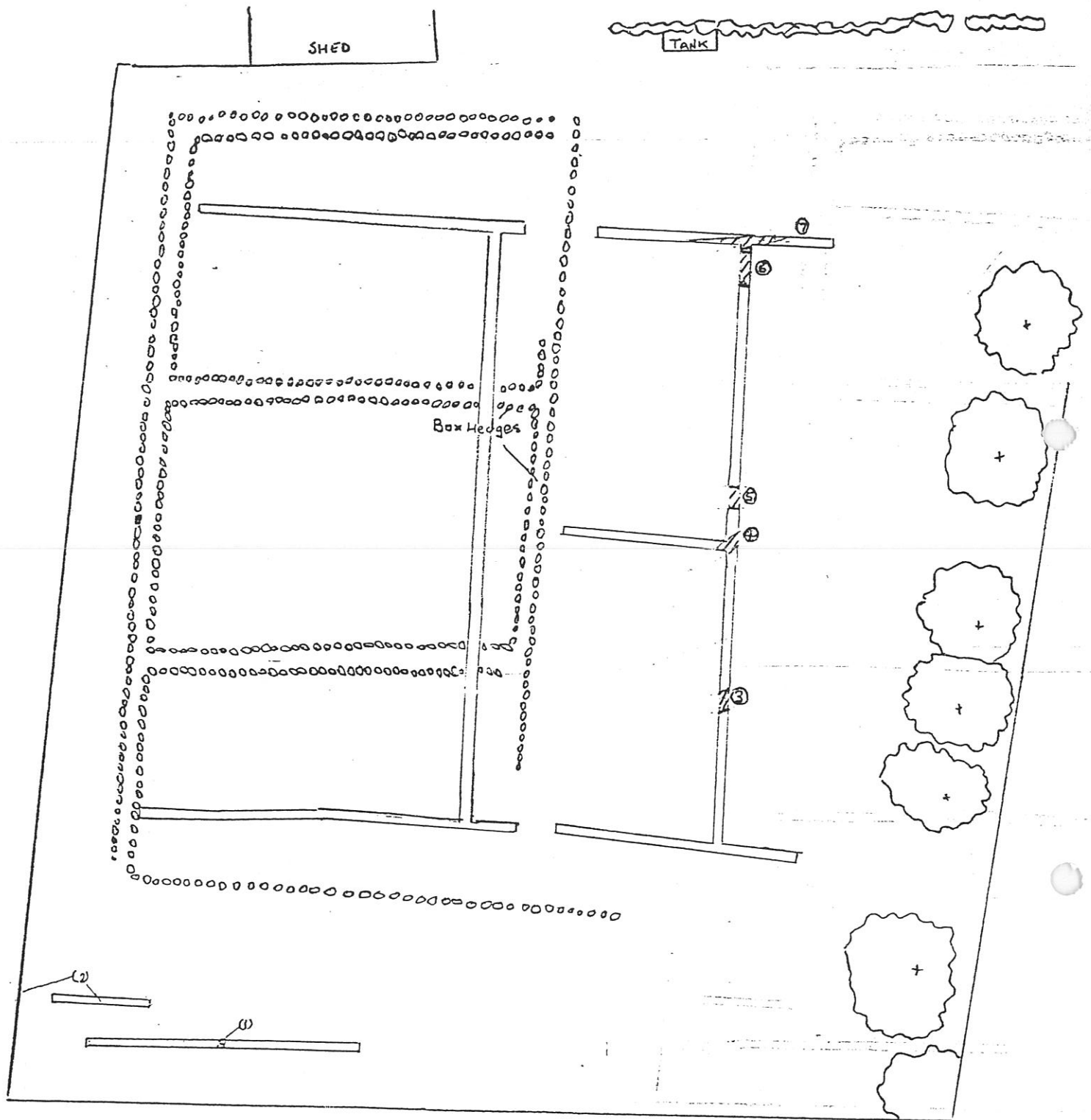
Acknowledgements

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Bibliography

Fraser-Mackintosh, C Invernessiana, 1875 Inverness.

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KINMYLIES' CHURCH SITE

Location of archaeological trial trenches

15m 30m