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# Salvage excavation and watching brief at Oathlaw and Tannadice Parish Church, Tannadice, Forfar, Angus

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with contributions by Adrian Cox, Katherine Forsyth and Derek W Hall

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## Introduction

SUAT Ltd was commissioned by The Parr Partnership on behalf of their client, Oathlaw and Tannadice Parish Church, to undertake a watching brief on the foundation trenches for the building of a new vestry at Oathlaw and Tannadice Parish Church, Tannadice.

The 19th-century vestry was demolished, and a new larger building was to be erected on the same site. The watching brief revealed a large quantity of disarticulated human bone within the foundation cuts for the 19th-century church, and burial ground soil containing further human remains. A Written Scheme of Investigation for an archaeological salvage excavation was then prepared by SUAT and agreed with Ian Shepherd, Area Archaeologist on behalf of Angus Council Planning Department.

The salvage excavation took place during the period 29th July to 14th August 2002, and a further two day watching brief took place during the 29th and 30th August 2002. The SUAT site code for this project was TD01.

## Location

The parish church of St Arnold's Tannadice (Oathlaw and Tannadice Parish Church) is located at NGR NO 4752 5807 on the river terrace close to the north bank of the South Esk (Illus 1).

## Historical background

The early history of the church at Tannadice is a confused one. According to Watson, in 1744 the minister of Tannadyce (sic) stated that the church was formerly dedicated to St Ernan in 1242 (Watson 1986, 321). Watson suggests that Ernan could be identified as the Irish Saint Ernuin of Midluachairthe who died in 714 and was the uncle of St Columba (Ibid 291, McKinlay 1914, 58). It seems likely that the modern dedication of St Arnold derives from a corruption of St Ernan. Medieval references to the church include a royal confirmation of 1189 which grants *ecclesiam de Thanetheis* to the Priors and Canons of St Andrews (Barrow 1971, 337). There then follows a whole string of supplications to the Pope between 1448 and 1471 regarding the

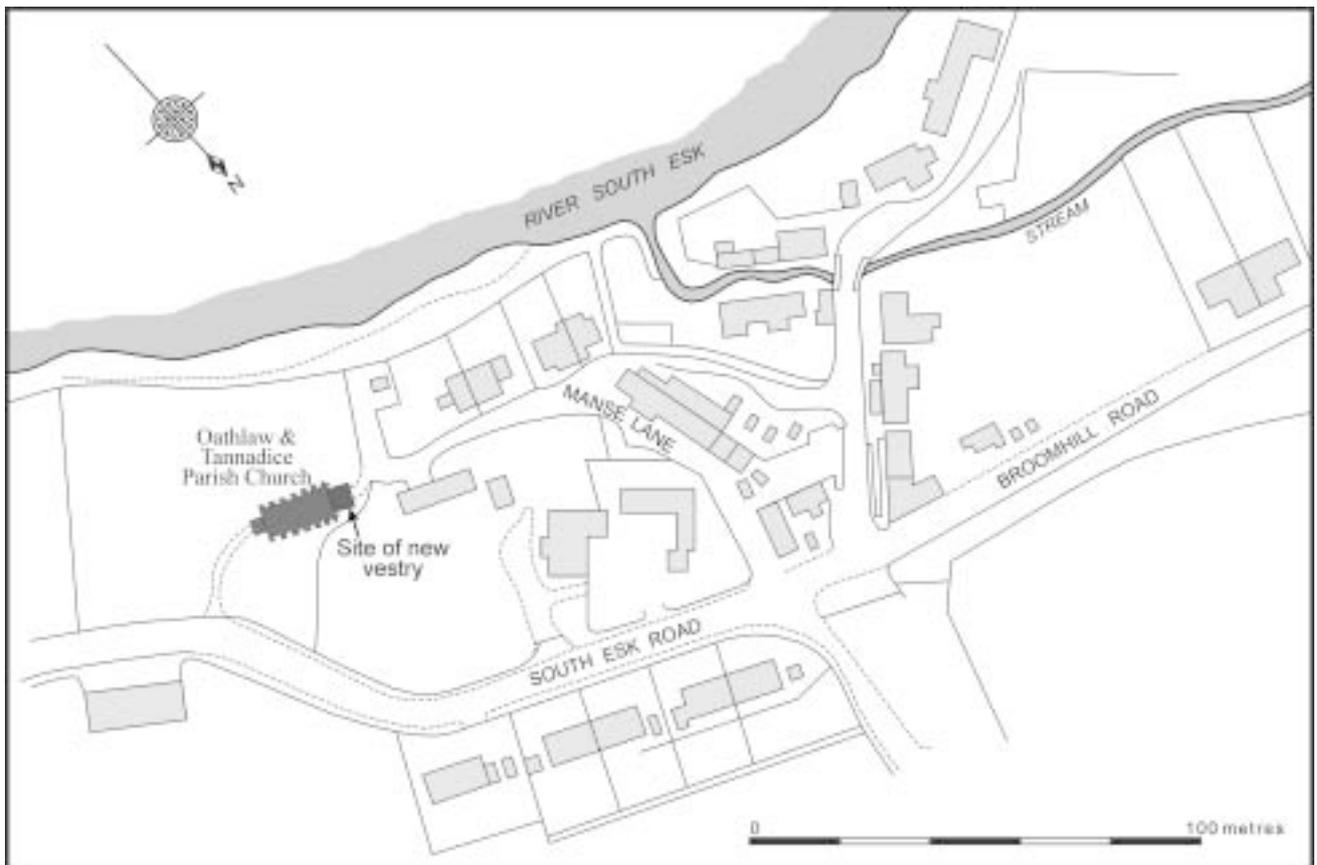
parsonage of Tannadice, which is valued at £50 (Kirk et al 1997, nos 216, 256, 465, 485, 529, 812, 1316, 1414, 1485, 1492 and 1507). This series of supplications indicates that there is a considerable battle going on over this particular parsonage whose value fluctuates between £30 and £50.

The next extant references date to the 18th century when the church was old and very basic, although there was still a chancel and oriel window indicating its pre-Reformation origins. By the New Statistical Account of 1845 the church is described as being 'in a tolerable state of repair, but otherwise very inconvenient and uncomfortable' (NSA 1845, 203). In 1846 a new church was built, but in 1866 it caught fire leaving only the walls standing. It must have been quickly repaired, because in the autumn of that year the present church was opened.

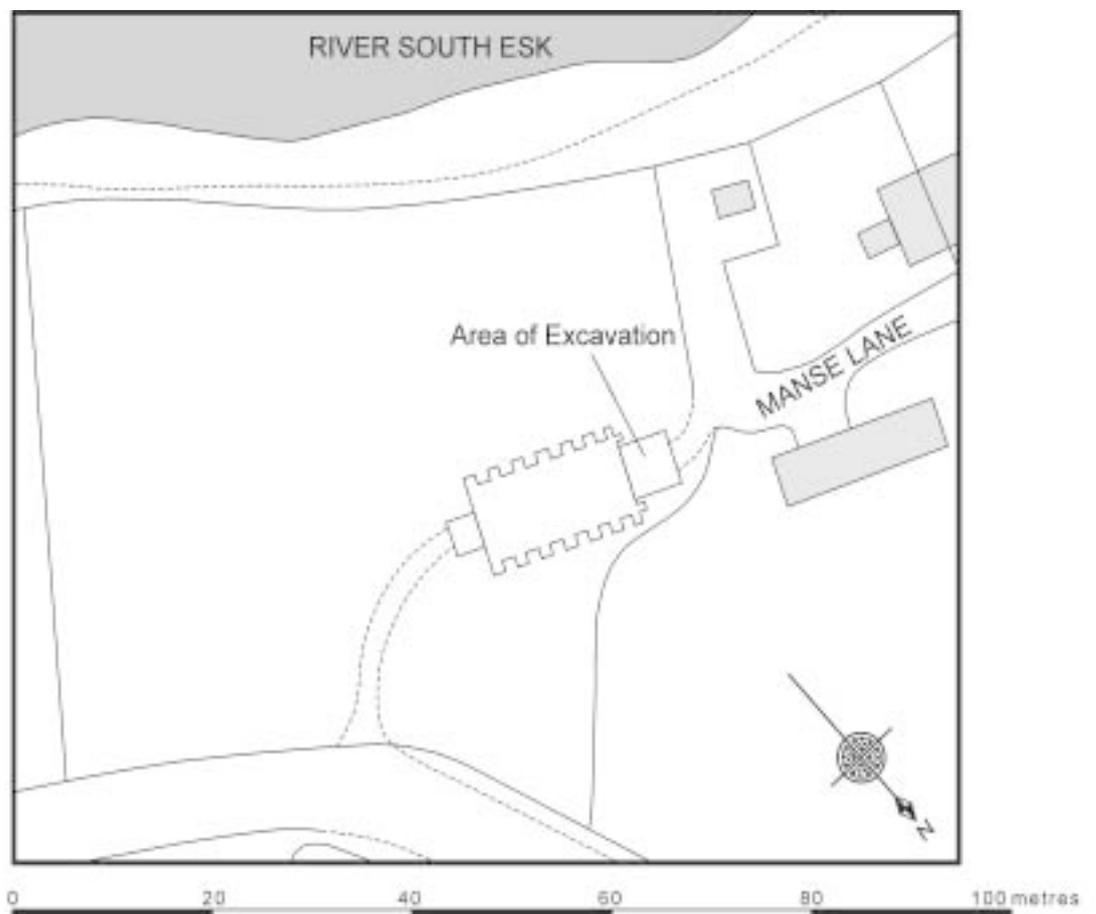
## Archaeological excavation

After the demolition of the old vestry, a watching brief took place on the contractors' excavations for the foundation trenches of the new building. It was observed that a substantial quantity of human bone had been placed within the foundation cut of the church and the vestry. A burial ground soil containing further human remains was also identified. It was apparent that the present church and its vestry had been constructed over a well-used part of the burial ground and that the remains of burials disturbed by that construction had been disposed of by placing bones within the backfill of the church's foundation trenches.

It was recommended that a salvage excavation rather than a watching brief should be undertaken. The methodology for the salvage excavation required that machining continue under archaeological supervision down to the top of the burial ground soil and/or any other relevant archaeological features. When the top of archaeologically sensitive deposits and features was identified, excavation continued by hand down to undisturbed natural subsoil. Excavation and recording was compromised because of the need for shuttering to prevent collapse of the trench. The foundation trenches were only 1.20m wide at the top, but by the end of the excavation had narrowed at the bottom to between 0.90m and 0.60m, with one part of the north trench being only 0.30m wide. As the trenches were excavated,



**Illus 1** Site location.



**Illus 2** Location of excavation.

the maximum safe depth of 1.40m was reached and shoring was required. Final depths to undisturbed natural reached a little below 2m.

Three trenches were excavated for the foundations of the new build; to the south, west and north. The area encompassed by the new building measured 6m east to west and 7m north to south. After the excavation of the three foundation trenches, a watching brief was conducted on the excavation of service trenches on the west side of the new build.

## Archaeological results

Four main phases of activity were recognised.

*Phase I* Earliest burials extending under an earlier wall in the northern trench, and a possible cist in the southern trench.

*Phase II* Earlier church walls, surfaces, in all trenches.

*Phase III* Burials inside and outside earlier church walls in all trenches.

*Phase IV* Present 19th-century church and vestry, made-up ground, most recent burials.

### Natural subsoil deposit

The natural subsoil comprised black-brown silt, with occasional river cobbles. This deposit had been intermittently stained with a black organic deposit. Approximately 0.15–0.20m below the silt was a compact yellow silty sand with abundant stone fragments. The natural subsoil was reached at 60.05m OD, or about 2m below the site surface.

#### *Phase I* (Illus 3)

In the northern trench, two burials (161 and 176) were recorded at the lowest levels and were aligned in a south-easterly direction. Context 161 was located at the north end of the west trench. It comprised the upper part of a skeleton which continued into the west facing section. Stones had been placed to keep the head facing upwards. The bone was very friable and in poor condition.

Burial (176) was located approximately mid-way along the north trench. Only the skull and the upper-east side of the burial could be recovered. The remainder continued into the north facing section. Rough sandstone slabs (177) appeared to have been associated with this burial but the burial may have in fact been inserted over earlier cist burials. The condition of the bone was poor, very white and friable. The slabs had been somewhat disturbed by later burials and the cut for a later (Phase II) wall.

Overlying burial (176) was a child burial (155). Although this was at the same level as the Phase III burials and similarly aligned, the placing of stones beside the head and the very decayed condition of the bone both suggest that this burial properly belongs with the

Phase I burials, pre-dating the church. Its shallowness compared with the other Phase I burials may be explained by it being a child burial, and perhaps squeezed in over an underlying cist burial (176).

In the southern trench, cut into the natural subsoil, were what appeared to be traces of a cist burial, but no skeletal remains were found. Only the south-eastern extent of the cut (167) into the subsoil was visible, and this was 0.23m in depth with concave edges and a flat base. The base was lined with slabs (164) of red sandstone which lay directly over natural.

#### *Phase II* (Illus 3, 4 and 5)

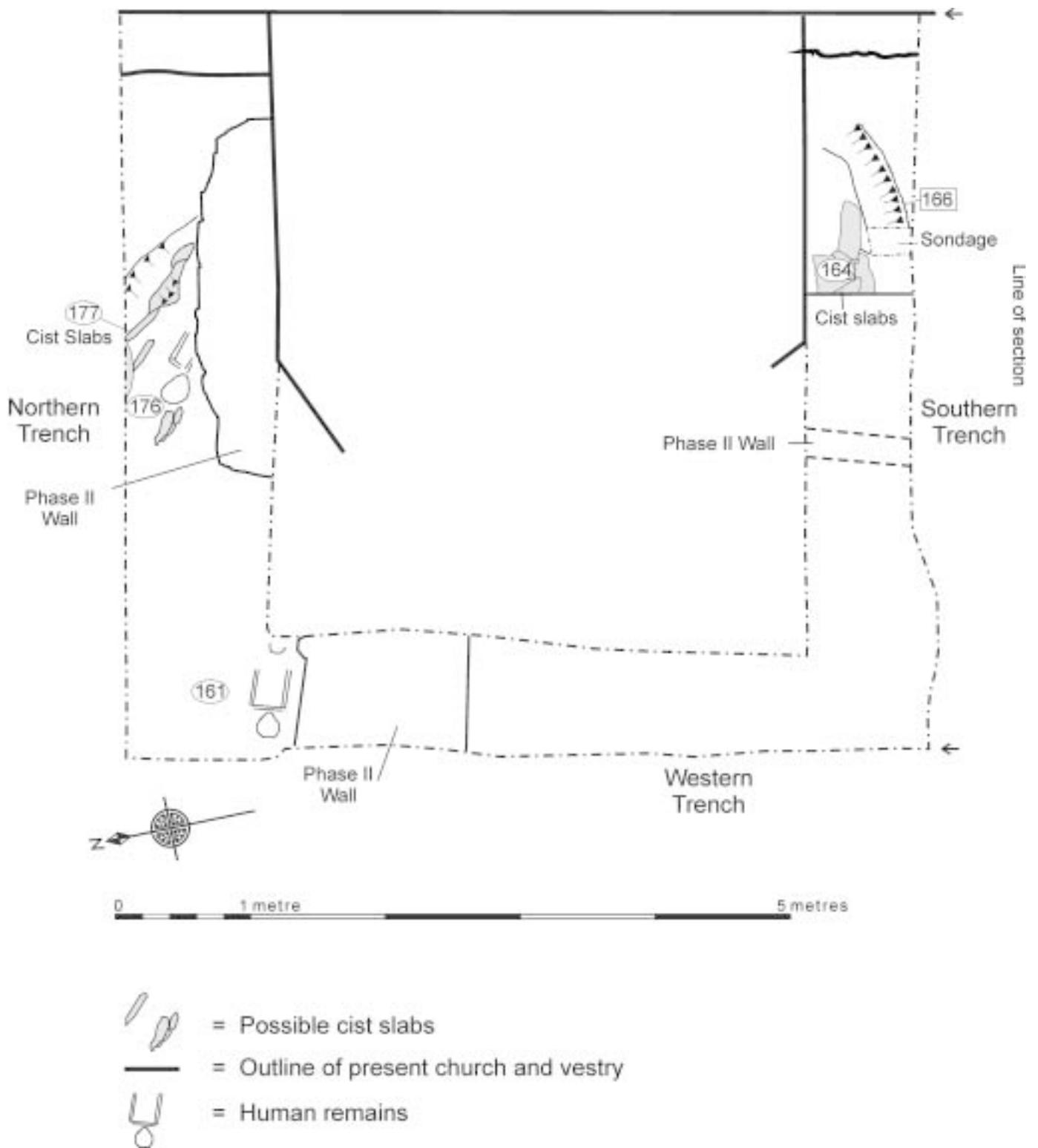
Phase II comprised substantial walls and some floor remains of the church immediately predating the present 19th-century church. The walls of the earlier church appeared in all trenches and also on the subsequent watching brief on the west side of the foundation trenches.

In the north trench, a wall (109) was considered to represent the north face of the north wall of the earlier church. This was constructed of small to medium river boulders, two or three courses remaining to a height of 0.87m. Over the river boulders, three flat, red sandstone slabs (179) had been mortared, perhaps as a string course. Wall (109) extended westwards for 2.90m to where it had been partly demolished by the excavation for the 19th-century vestry steps.

Westward of the vestry, wall (109) continued into the northern end of the western trench and was recorded as (112). At this point the mechanical excavator used by the contractors had cut through the wall and details of its construction could be observed. The base was 1.60m wide, and formed of large to medium clay-bonded river cobbles. Set upon the foundation was a build of red sandstone rubble, the lower part of which was clay-bonded and the upper part mortar-bonded. Wall (112) survived to a height of 1.40m, the very top of which was only 0.20m below the present site surface.

In the southern trench, the north inside face of a substantial wall (114) was found which was considered to be the south wall of the earlier church. Part of the wall's inside facing had been robbed revealing the loose inner core (48). The wall face (114) extended 2.30m eastwards from the trench west end. The construction of wall (114) was similar to that of (112), but the bottom river boulders were not clay-bonded. The wall was very neatly faced and survived to a height of 1.88m. Like (112) this also survived only 0.20m below the present site surface.

Physically abutting the eastern end of (114), another wall (117) was identified on a north to south alignment. This wall was 1.20m in width and stood to a height of 0.90m. The wall top was 1m below the site surface. The lower foundation comprised large cobbles and sandstone fragments with clay bonding. The upper part of the wall comprised thick flat sandstone blocks worn smooth, bonded with brown sandy mortar; these



Illus 3 Phase 1 burials.



**Illus 4** Stone long cist 164 looking south-eastwards.

stones appeared more like a floor surface than a wall. The east face of the wall was not observed, indicating that the top stones of the wall were part of a westward extending floor. It appears as though wall (117) must have been demolished and overlain with stone floor slabs which continued over the wall's east face. The function of this wall was not ascertained. It appeared to be an internal feature of the Phase II church, while the top flat stonework formed flooring for the church. Of interest was a large red sandstone slab, (182), recovered during the watching brief prior to excavation and adjacent to wall (117). This slab had a shallow 0.15m x 0.13m socket cut into it which may have been the seat for an upright square post.

The southern wall (114) of the earlier church was not seen to continue eastwards beyond wall (117). This may have been because either the wall did not extend eastwards, or the trench was not wide enough to expose the face of wall (114) at this location.

During the subsequent watching brief (Illus 5) a red sandstone rubble wall (201), aligned east to west was observed, located 4m to the west of the west trench edge. Also identified during the watching brief, about 0.50m below the site surface, were three red sandstone

slabs (200) on the east side of the wall (201), which may represent flooring, possibly a continuation of the floor slabs (117) found in the southern foundation trench.

#### *Phase III* (Illus 3, 4 and 5)

Burials considered contemporary with the earlier church were found within the apparent interior of the building, between the walls (112 and 114), and outwith the church, in the northern trench. Those in the northern trench were considered contemporary as they respected the northern wall of the church

Burials found in the northern trench were excavated individually as they were mostly articulated, and were as follows:-

Burial (162) most of the upper body of this individual had decayed, but the leg bones were in reasonable condition. The midriff appeared to have sunk into the subsoil. The bone was very white and friable.

Burial (159) this was located at the west end of the northern trench and was intact and in average condition. The hands were over the pelvis.

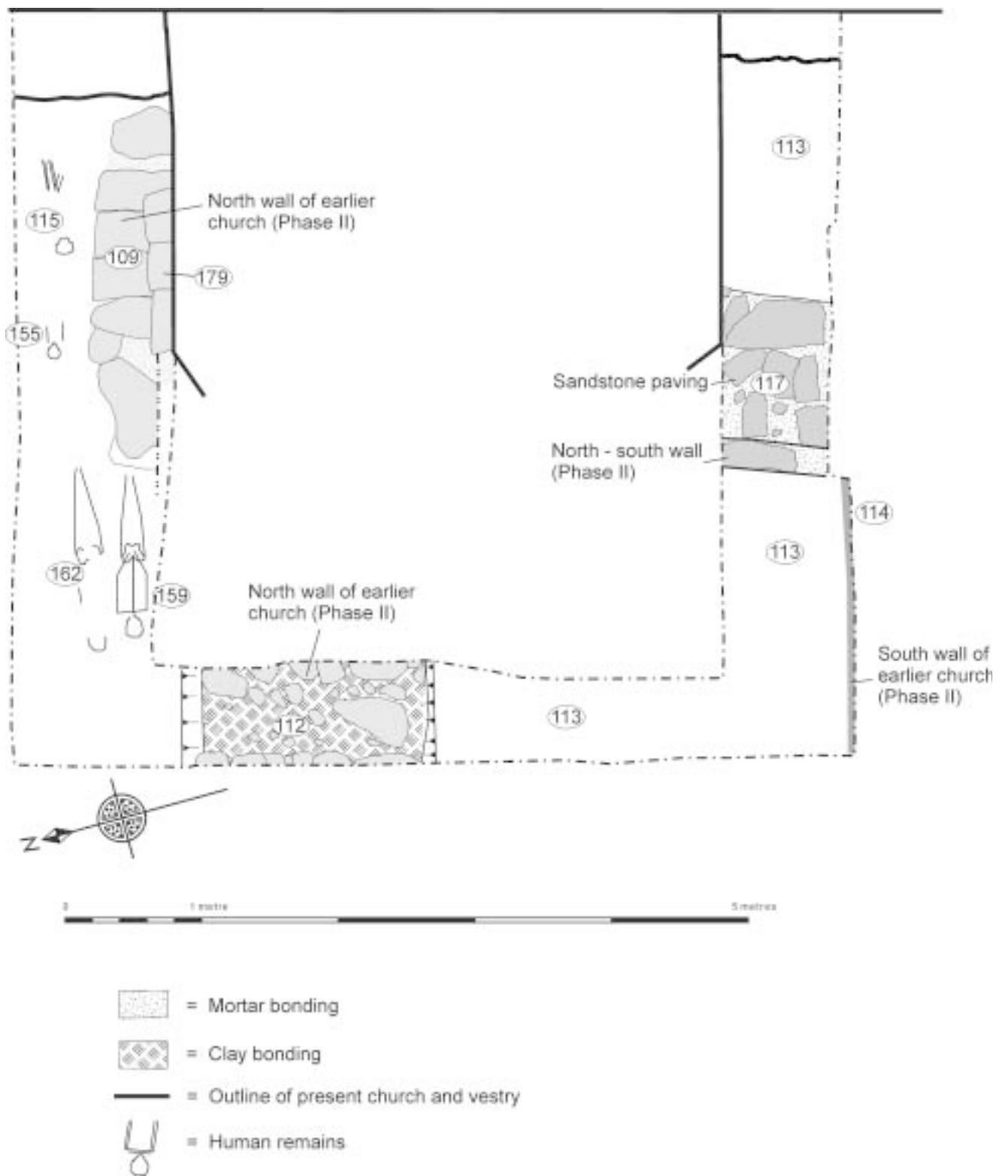
Burial (155) this comprised the skeleton of a child with sandstone fragments on either side of the head. The bones were very friable and broke up when brushed. Although this burial was at the same level as the Phase III burials and similarly aligned, the placing of stones beside the head and the very decayed condition of the bone both suggest that this burial properly belongs with the Phase I burials, pre-dating the church. Its shallowness compared with the other Phase I burials may be explained by it being a child burial, and perhaps squeezed in over an underlying cist burial (176).

Burial (115) this was an articulated skeleton at the east end of the trench. It lay in a crouched position, face upward with knees drawn up to the chest and right arm up to the chest. This position was very odd, and may indicate that rigor mortis had set in before the body could be properly laid out.

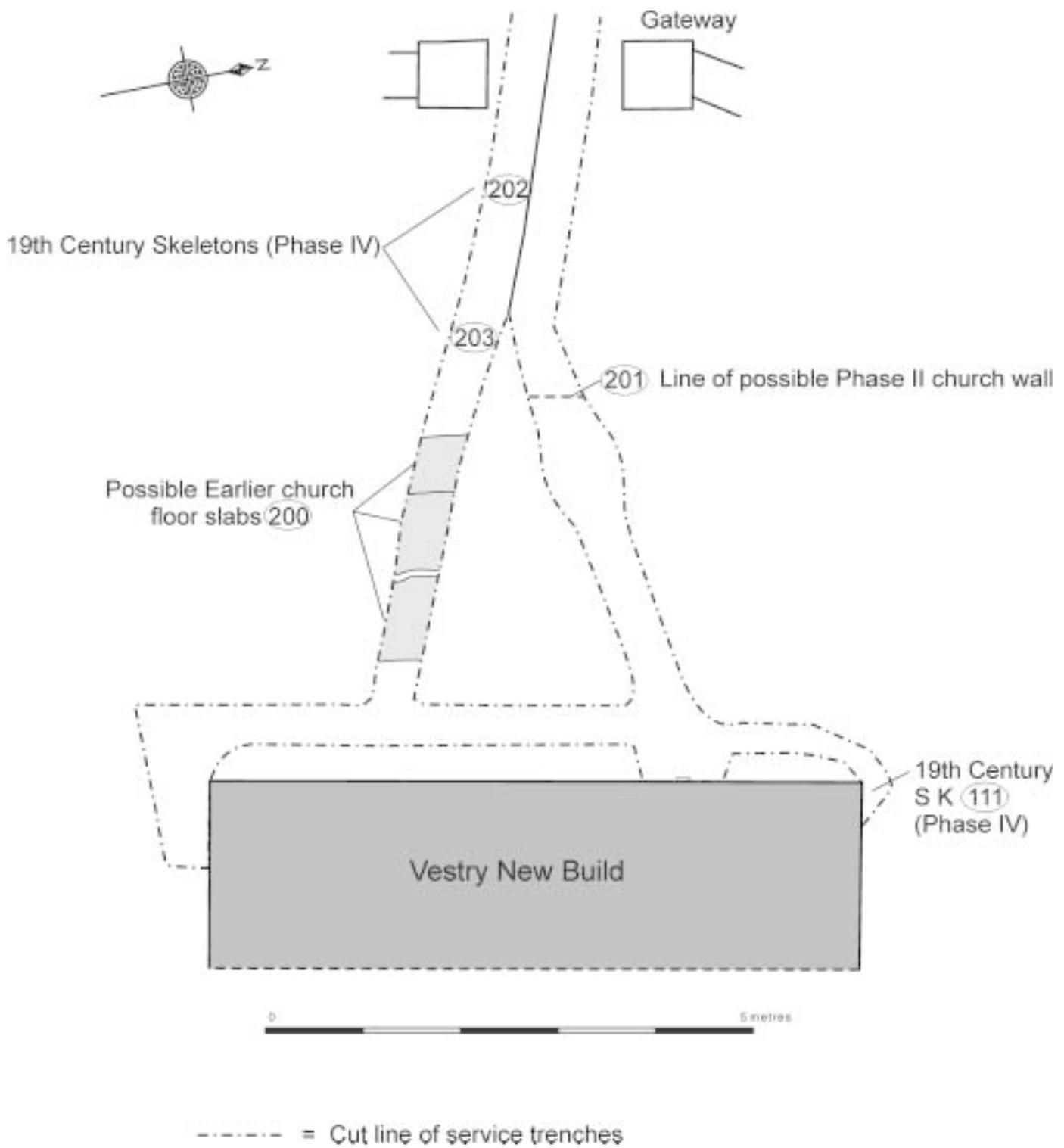
A great number of burials was found packed into the area between the earlier church walls (112 and 114). In general the condition of the bone was better than that found in the eastern trench, perhaps because the burials had been sheltered below the floor level inside the earlier church. The burials were aligned east to west, parallel with the walls.

The burials within the earlier church were not recovered individually as they had obviously been deposited over a great period of time, and the burial process had cut and recut earlier burials time after time leading to great quantities of bone, both articulated and disarticulated. Of interest were four skulls neatly aligned against the southern wall (114), probably indicating that one burial had disturbed four previous burials.

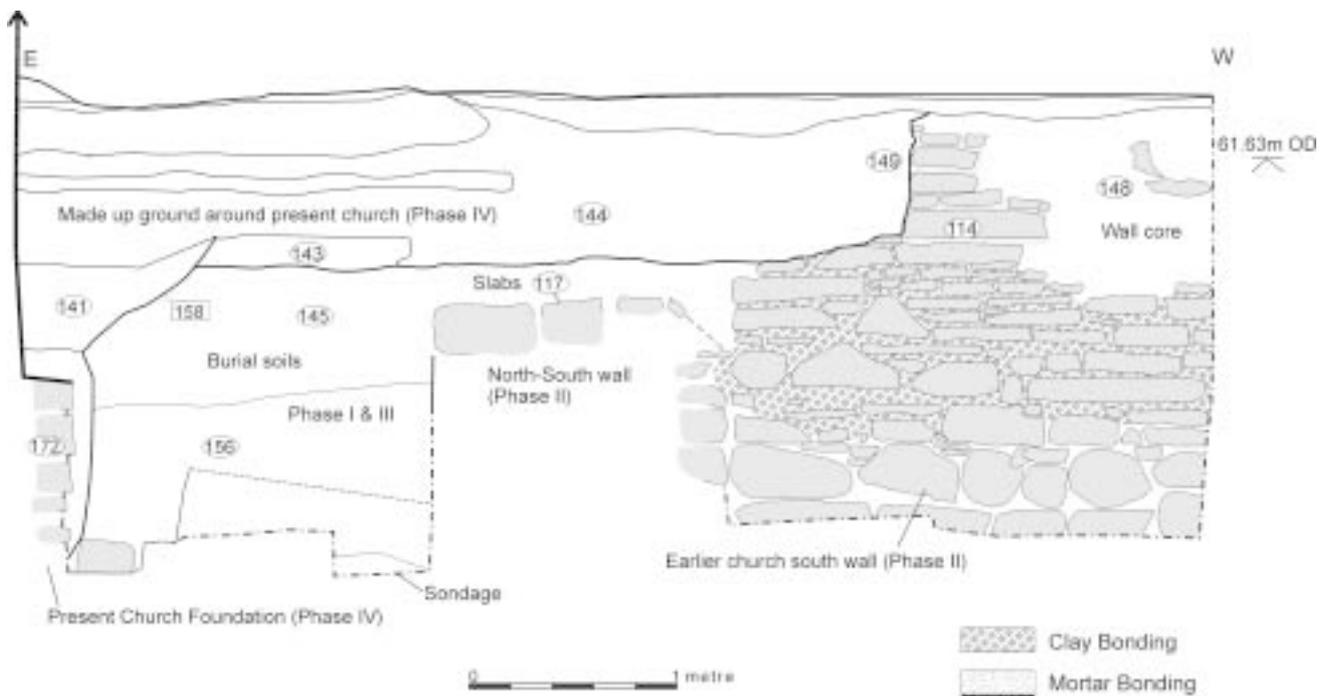
The burials were in a matrix of grey sand loam (113) containing abundant rounded and fragmented stone. This appeared to be made-up ground below the earlier church floor. One carved stone fragment was



**Illus 5** Phase II remains of earlier church, Phase III burials.



**Illus 6** Watching brief on service trenches, showing Phase II Wall (201), floor slabs (200) and Phase IV skeletons.



**Illus 7** North-facing section of south trench, showing Phase II church wall, Phase I and II burial soils and Phase IV present church.

found within this deposit that may represent part of a free-standing screen from inside an ecclesiastical building (Illus 7). Other finds included coffin nails and shroud pins. Several sherds of medieval pottery were also recovered (see below, Pottery Report).

Below (113), further burials were cut into a dark clay loam, the original ground surface upon which the earlier church was constructed.

#### *Phase IV*

In 1846 the present church was built over the remains of the earlier church and burial ground. It is not certain if the vestry was built at this time or if it was added on during the 1866 rebuild. The vestry actually abutted the west wall of the present church although stonework had been keyed in for the doorways that had been cut through the church's western wall.

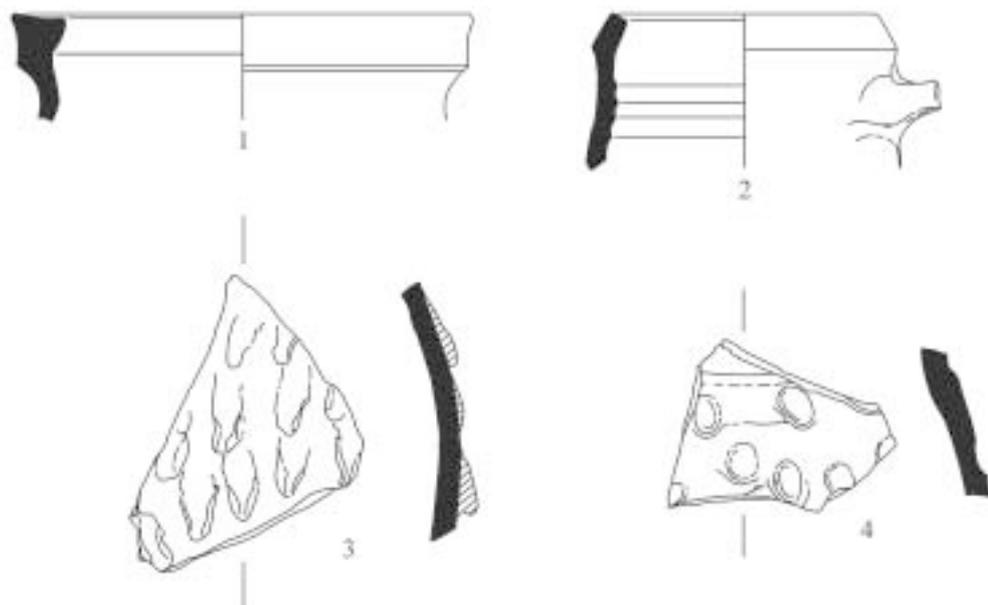
The tops of the cuts for the 19th-century church foundations indicate that ground level was then generally lower than at present, and lower within the church than externally. In the northern trench, the south-facing section indicates that the cut was 0.50m below the present surface and had been made through burial ground soil, whereas in the southern trench the cut (158) was 0.80m below current ground level and had been made from the level of the earlier church floor. This indicated that the burial ground outwith the north side of the earlier church was 0.30m higher than the interior floor surface.

It seems that by the time it came to be replaced in the 19th century, the early church had become partly subterranean, due to the steady build up of graveyard soil around it. This was a common problem with medieval churches, and is recorded at Dunino in Fife, where it was one of the reasons for replacing the church in the 19th century (Bowler 2002). A similar situation can still be seen at St John's Kirk in Perth.

At the time of the construction of the 19th-century church at Tannadice, the northern and southern walls of the earlier church (112 and 114) must have been left partly upstanding. After the completion of the 19th-century church, the ground surface was raised by 0.50–0.80m to its present level of approximately 61.90m OD.

During the building of the present church, a great number of burials were disturbed, and bones were disposed of by burying them in the backfill (141) of the foundation trenches. Excavation for the underground boiler room of the vestry would have disturbed the many burials that had taken place below the floor level of the earlier church. The north wall of the vestry was partly constructed on top of the boulders forming the north wall (109) of the earlier church.

As seen in the northern trench, burials actually took place in the newly raised ground surface. At the western end of the northern trench, the lower part of a burial (111) was found only 0.50m below the site surface. During the subsequent watching brief on the west side of the new build, the upper part of (111) was uncovered and two further burials (202 and 203) were found at a similar depth.



Illus 8 Medieval pottery. Scz

## The pottery (Illus 8)

Derek Hall

This excavation produced 21 sherds of pottery, all of medieval date. All the potsherds are manufactured in a locally produced redware fabric which dates between the 13th and 15th centuries (Hall 1998, 170–178). Similar pottery was recovered from excavations on Castle Street in Forfar (Spearman 1982, 455–64). The production centres for this fabric have yet to be located.

The only vessels present are glazed jugs, at least one of which is decorated with applied pellets (Cat 3), while another vessel in this group has a narrow neck with a small strap handle (Cat 2). The presence of the pellet decoration and a narrow necked vessel may suggest that this small group dates to the latter end of the production of this fabric in the 15th century.

## The worked stone fragment (Illus 9)

Katherine Forsyth

### Summary

The fragment is a small section of ornamental tracery of Medieval date, probably part of a free-standing screen or similar from an ecclesiastical building.

### Description

Fragment TD01 is a piece of reddish sandstone of roughly rectangular cross-section. Its maximum dimensions are H. c 90mm, W. c 90mm, T. c 50mm. It is broken at both ends, but the other four contiguous faces are intact. Tool marks are visible on all original surfaces. One of the two shorter sides is bowed in cross-section. The other has a slightly bowed front half, then

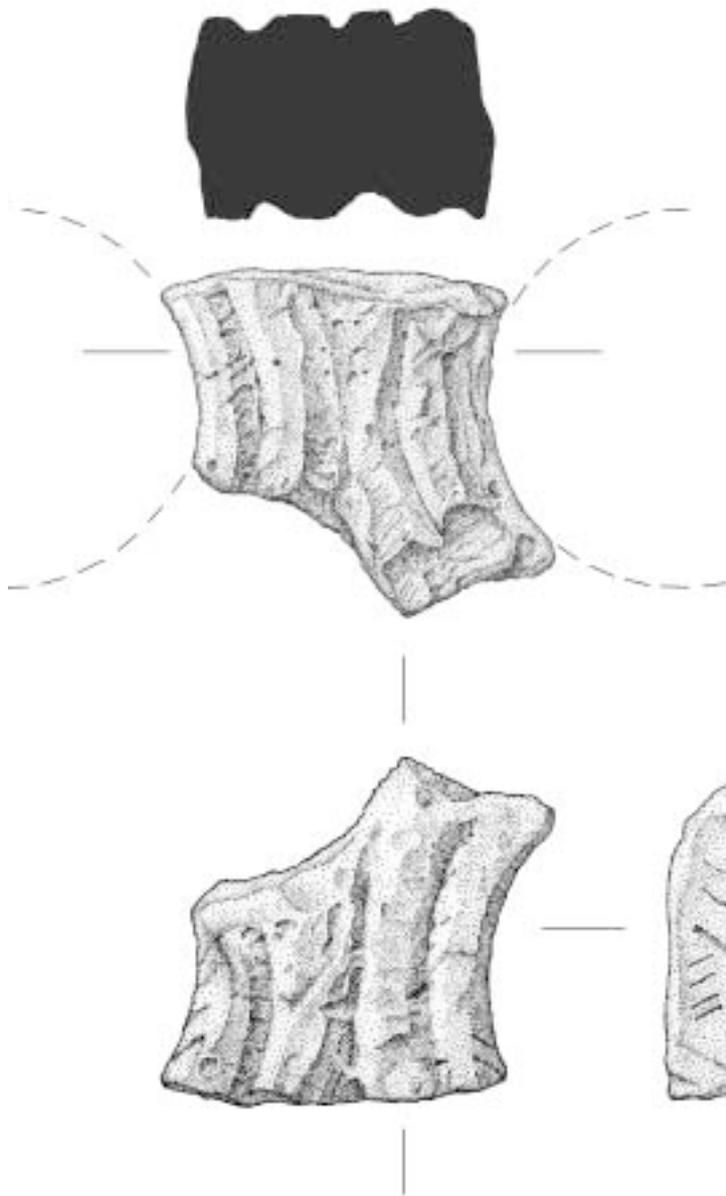
an indistinct step down to the back half which shelves inwards. The two long sides are flat and parallel. Each is incised with three v-shaped grooves which run the full length of the face. The two outer grooves curve away from each other, while the middle groove broadens towards the top and bottom. Thus they form sections of two opposing curves of flat, ribbon moulding with medial groove (each ring roughly 30mm broad comprising two bands, each roughly 10mm and a groove roughly 10mm). The grooves on one face are more substantial than on the other, implying the monument, although intended to be viewed from both sides, had a distinct 'front' and 'back'.

The Tannadice fragment bears a superficial resemblance to a fragment of the head of a free-standing cross with curving armpits. Closer examination of the better preserved end, however, reveals that the element was not solid, but bifurcated. The extant portion thus constitutes the point of contact between a pair of conjoined rings. The gradient of the curves is such that, if extended, they would appear to have been circular. The left-hand ring, as viewed from the 'front', has broken off at the join. But the right-hand ring continues for a further 20mm beyond this, revealing part of the original outer circumference.

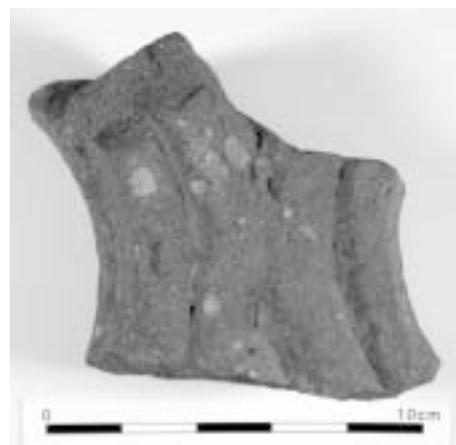
There are four main breaks: a single one across the whole of one end, and at the other end, one across the left-hand ring where it diverges, another 20mm further along the right-hand ring and a small one at the back of the right-hand ring. The latter is comparatively fresh, but the main break on the right-hand ring appears rather more weathered than the others perhaps implying it lay exposed for a period before the stump broke off.

### Discussion

An early medieval date may be ruled out at the outset: such open-work forms are unprecedented at this period.



**Illus 9** *Worked stone fragment. Scale 1:2.*



**Illus 10** *Worked stone fragment from the excavation.*

The fragment appears, rather, to be a piece of small-scale ornamental tracery, most likely from an ecclesiastical building. It is difficult to date such a small fragment but the probability is that, though Medieval, it is quite late (14th–16th century). Neither of the circular openings has a runnel to hold glass and although the right-hand side alone is stepped, the edge seems too irregular to have formed a check for a pane of glass. The fragment is unlikely, therefore, to have come from a window. Instead it may have formed part of a tomb, shrine, altar rail, or screen, or indeed some other architectural fitting. Whatever the original setting it may have been quite modest. The tracery appears to have been fairly small-scale and the carving, though competent, is not of the finest quality.

### The artefacts (Illus 10)

Adrian Cox

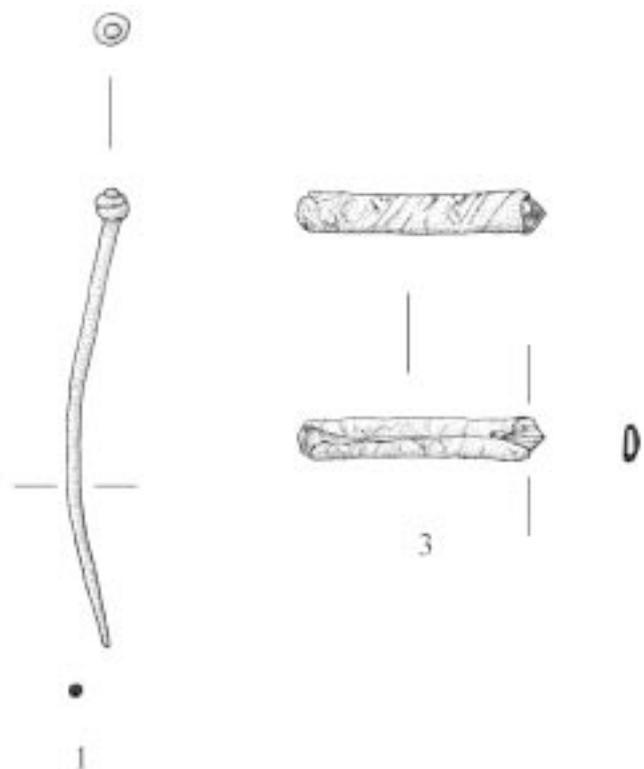
The artefacts from the excavation are discussed below within material categories, and a selective catalogue is included. Measurements are expressed to the nearest 1mm, except where they are less than this, when they are expressed to the nearest 0.1mm.

### Copper alloy objects

#### Pins

Of the ten pins recovered, the largest cluster came from two contexts representing graveyard soils associated with the earlier church. All but one of the pins are of the same general type, made from drawn wire, with the head formed by winding a small coil of wire around the top of the shaft, and secured by either an adhesive substance or by soldering. Their sizes, however, vary quite widely, the largest (Catalogue No 1) measuring 62mm in length while the smallest measures 25mm. No 2, falling between these extremes, is around a typical size. Small pins of this type were used in large numbers by tailors, essentially as dress pins, although they performed a variety of other functions involving securing textiles, in this case possibly burial shrouds. While most of the pins recovered are probably of late medieval or early post-medieval date, an example from the backfill of the foundation cut for the present church walls is of 19th-century date.

- 1 Pin** Length 62mm; width at head 4mm; diameter of shaft 2mm  
Complete pin with a wound-wire head and a circular cross-sectioned shaft. Wire-drawing marks are visible on the shaft.  
Context 113; Find No 5; Phase III



**Illus 11** Selected artefacts. Scale 1:1.

- 2 Pin** Length 36mm; width at head 3mm; diameter of shaft 1mm  
Complete pin with a wound-wire head and a slightly curving, circular cross-sectioned shaft, the top of which projects slightly above the head. (Not illustrated)  
Context 156; Find No 1; Phase III

#### Lace ends

Lace ends were used to terminate laces and thongs, to prevent their ends from fraying and to facilitate threading. Throughout the late medieval period and into the 17th century, they would have had a multiplicity of uses in fastening various types of garments.

It was common for numbers of lace ends to be used even in a single costume: the number used on an individual doublet and hose, for example, varied from two to twelve pairs (Cunnington and Cunnington 1969, 108). Examples have been recovered from excavations throughout Scotland (Cox 1996a, 56). The three lace ends found here were recovered from a graveyard soil deposit associated with the earlier church on the site and may date from the late medieval period. It is possible that they terminated laces used to secure shrouds or other burial attire.

Each lace end was made from copper alloy sheet, rolled tightly around the end of the lace or thong. No 3 is an unusual example, decorated by a repeating pattern of lozenges and pellets. The nature of the decoration indicates that it was probably made from a previously

decorated sheet. Lace ends fabricated from previously decorated sheets have also been excavated in Dunfermline and Elgin (Cox 1996b, 92, No 4; 1998, 790, Illus 17, No 8). The other two lace ends recovered (including No 4) are smaller, undecorated examples.

No 5, also from the graveyard soil, is a catch plate, possibly from a multi-piece buckle or a strap fitting.

**3 Lace end** Length 32mm; max width 5mm; thickness 2mm  
Lace end made from a tightly folded, thin sheet, the surface of which is decorated by a repeating pattern of lozenges containing central pellets. The sheet has an edge to edge seam, is roughly broken at both ends, and encloses a fragment of lace.

Context 113; Find No 3; Phase III

**4 Lace end** Length 18mm; width 2mm; thickness 2mm  
Lace end made from a tightly folded, thin sheet with an edge to edge seam. Slightly distorted at one end. (Not illustrated)

Context 113; Find No 4; Phase III

**5 Plate** Length 43mm; width 29mm; thickness 0.9mm  
Rectangular plate with a short, rectangular projection from one end, curled over to form a partial loop. A similar projection was present at the opposite end but is now broken. (Not illustrated)

Context 113; Find No 6; Phase III

## Iron objects

A key recovered from a graveyard soil deposit (No 6) represents a door key. It has an oval bow and the shank terminal appears to be hollow. Although the object is obscured by corrosion products, its discernable features, including a rectangular bit that appears offset from the central axis of the shank, indicate a pre-19th century date.

Several nails were recovered from the backfill of the cut for the present church foundations. Some of these have wood pseudomorphs attached, and may have been used in coffin construction. Different sizes are represented, although most exhibit roughly circular heads and rectangular shafts. No 7 possibly represents part of a right-angled fixture used in coffin construction. Although largely obscured by corrosion products, No 8 appears to have a roughly circular, looped terminal and may be a buckle pin or a looped fitting.

**6 Key** Length 98mm; width of bow 38mm; depth of bit 25mm  
Key with a rectangular cross-sectioned, oval bow and a circular cross-sectioned shank (possibly hollow at the bit end). The bit is rectangular in outline. Heavily corroded. (Not illustrated)

Context 113; Find No 7; Phase III

**7 Nail or angled tack** Length 46mm; width at head 9mm  
Small nail with a narrow terminal, possibly forming part of right-angle. Wood pseudomorphs are attached. (Not illustrated)

Context 102; Find No 8; Phase IV

**8 Buckle pin or fitting** Length 49mm; width at loop 14mm; thickness 6mm  
Possible buckle pin or fitting, comprising a rectangular cross-sectioned shaft with a looped terminal. Heavily corroded. (Not illustrated)

Context 102; Find No 9; Phase IV

## Glass

Two small fragments of window glass were recovered. One is a very small fragment (length 21mm), black in colour and opaque, found in a deposit of made-up ground beneath the floor of the earlier church. The other, slightly larger fragment (length 27mm) has a pale brown surface patina and is in a more weathered condition. This piece, from the fill of a cut for the present church's foundations, appears to retain at least one of the original edges of the pane. The presence of quantities of rubble and mortar in the foundation trench fill may have created an alkaline environment detrimental to the preservation of glass.

## Stone building material

A small number of stone roof slate fragments (eg No 9) and a single other architectural fragment were recovered. The latter is roughly triangular in outline with one surviving tooled edge with a curving profile.

**9 Roof slate** Length 206mm; max width 178mm; thickness 15mm  
Roof slate fragment, broken across a roughly circular perforation and roughly triangular in outline. (Not illustrated)

Context 156; Find No 10; Phase III

## Coin

A single coin was recovered from a levelling deposit of probable 19th-century date.

## The radiocarbon dates

[Awaiting dates from SURRC.]

## General discussion

At Tannadice Parish Church the narrow and deep construction trenches required for the replacement vestry and its service trenches provided the opportunity to investigate the underlying archaeology associated with this potential Early Christian site. Four basic phases of activity were identified. These phases dated from possible Early Christian times through to the construction of a medieval or late medieval church over which the present 19th-century church and its vestry were constructed.

The earliest phase consisted of two burials in the north trench which were aligned in a south-easterly direction. The burials actually extended under the north

wall of the earlier church, indicating that they predated this build. The presence of these burials suggests that there was Christian activity on this site pre-dating the building of the earlier church. One of these early burials appears to be associated with vertical sandstone slabs possibly indicating the presence of a cist, however it is equally possible that this particular burial may have cut an earlier cist burial.

The remains of a possible cist were also identified in the southern foundation trench, and were certainly earlier than the latest church.

As previously discussed, the child burial (155) with 'cheek stones' may also belong in the latter part of this phase. The use of stones either side of the head is reminiscent, in a simplified form, of the stone slab boxes constructed around the heads of the cist burials in the early medieval cemetery at Castle Park Dunbar, radiocarbon dated between the 9th and early 13th centuries (Perry 2000, 283–294, 313), and is even more closely paralleled by a group of five 'flanked skull' burials at St Mary's Kirkhill, St Andrews. One of these was radiocarbon dated between the 7th and the 9th centuries. (Rains and Hall 1997, 9–13).

The presence of burials pre-dating the early church, the evidence of cists, and the distinctive burial with 'cheek stones' (155) all strongly suggest a phase of Early Christian activity predating the church, and provide the first physical evidence to confirm the supposed Early Christian origins for this site. The northern and southern walls of the church were found, showing that the church was just over 4m in width. A western wall presumed to be part of this earlier church was located in the watching brief and revealed the church to be at least 9m in length. Red sandstone floor slabs were found in the southern foundation trench and similar slabs were identified during the watching brief. No relationship between these could be proven but it is possible that they represent the floor of the earlier church. A north to south wall, which was capped with slabs, was found abutting the south wall but its function could not be determined. It probably represents an internal division and change of floor level within the early church, but too little of the building was found to attempt to reconstruct its plan.

No precise dating evidence for the earlier church was found, although pottery recovered from the burial soil inside the church could indicate it was in use from as early as the 13th or 15th centuries. The density and disturbance of the burials indicated that the practice of burying below the floor level had continued for a long time, probably centuries. Shroud pins found with the associated burials would also tend to indicate a medieval date, while coffin nails would indicate that burials were continued into more recent times, probably up until it was demolished around the 1840s.

The final phase of activity was the construction of the present church in 1846. The church was affected by fire in 1866 but it reopened in the same year, indicating that the main walls had survived and been retained. The 19th-century church was constructed over the remains

of the former church, and human bone from disturbed burials was mixed in with the backfill of the foundation cuts. A great quantity of this human bone must have come from the excavation of the underground boiler room and its stairwell as this was directly over the interior and below the floor level of the old church. After the construction of the 19th-century church the ground level was raised; three burials were found that had been cut through the new surface and had been interred at the surprisingly shallow depth of only 0.50m below modern ground surface.

## Rescue archaeology and Scottish churches

Derk Hall

In concluding the report on the excavations at Oathlaw and Tannadice Parish Church, it is worth reviewing the problems that have been encountered regarding the proper dissemination of the important results of this project. Under the terms of Scottish Planning Legislation (NPPG 5 and PAN 42), the proposal to build the new vestry on this church attracted a condition specifying the need for an archaeological watching brief on all below-ground excavations. This was duly costed and undertaken but then a salvage excavation had to take place due to the extensive archaeological deposits which were encountered. All this archaeological work was paid for by the church as developer, but the post-excavation costs only allowed for the production of a standard Data Structure Report which could then be archived and submitted by the developer as evidence that they had complied with the condition. It was only after a successful bid to Historic Scotland that SUAT Ltd were able to C14 date the cist burials and produce this publishable version of the excavation report. What can be learned from this exercise?

Firstly it indicates how important it is that adequate archaeological advice is available at an early stage to all churches in Scotland who may intend to erect new buildings. Obviously such advice is already on hand from the relevant local authority archaeologist but in the author's experience they are often sidelined or not consulted at all. The Church of Scotland's Consultative Committee on Artistic Matters is another potential source of archaeological advice, but yet again this committee is not always consulted. For several years the Council for Scottish Archaeology's churches committee had tried to set up a network of archaeological advisors but found it difficult to attract the support and interest of presbyteries and congregations. The recent disbanding of this CSA committee means that the baton has now been picked up by a newly formed company Scottish Church Heritage Research Ltd whose first aim is to complete the Gazetteer of the Scottish Church Heritage. This gazetteer, when complete, will essentially act as an easy reference point for all churches in Scotland that may want to know more about their church prior to any redevelopment proposals. In England and Wales a system of Diocesan and Cathedral advisors is in place

to ensure that the problems encountered at Tannadice are unlikely to happen.

Secondly this project also proves how difficult it is to predict the survival of archaeology on early Scottish church sites due to the absence of adequately recorded information.

The author feels that the time may be ripe for a review of the Scottish Executive's policy regarding such developments and how the archaeological needs of such works can be adequately funded and reported on. Many churches spend a vast amount of time and effort to raise the money for their new buildings, it is unfortunate that archaeology may end up being viewed as an unnecessary development tax when on most occasions the results of the excavations can end up enhancing and promoting the long and complex history of many of our Scottish churches.

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### Abstract

SUAT Ltd undertook an archaeological salvage excavation on the foundation trenches for a replacement vestry to be built against the west wall of the Oathlaw and Tannadice Parish Church at Tannadice. After limited machining, three foundation trenches were archaeologically excavated down to natural subsoil, reached at a depth of 2m below the site surface. At least three phases of burials were encountered, the earliest being cist burials. Remains of an earlier church, in the form of walls and some slab flooring were recorded. Shroud pins, a coin, medieval pottery sherds and coffin nails were also recovered. A subsequent watching brief on service trenches on the west side of the excavation recorded the west wall of the earlier church, some paving and two shallow burials. The recovered human remains will be re-interred with appropriate ceremony at a suitable spot within the burial ground.

### Keywords

cist burials  
 medieval pottery  
 ornamental tracery  
 St Ernan

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