
PERTH HIGH STREET

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION

1975–1977

Fascicule 1

The excavations at 75–95 High Street
and 5–10 Mill Street, Perth

David Perry, Hilary Murray,
Tom Beaumont James
and the late Nicholas Q Bogdan

with contributions by
B Anne Crone, Mary Márkus, Mike Baillie and David Bowler

TAYSIDE AND FIFE ARCHAEOLOGICAL COMMITTEE

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Front cover Excavations at 75 High Street, Perth, from the air
(© Perth High Street Excavation Committee)

Back cover 3D reconstruction of Building 18.
(Drawn by Dave Munro. © Historic Scotland)

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2010

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Foreword

It was in Perth in the mid 1970s that we saw, for the first time in Scotland, just how rich the urban archaeological resource might be. Perth is still the jewel in our urban archaeological crown, unique amongst Scottish towns for the depth, importance and consistently high quality of its archaeological remains. On the High Street, a depth of four metres of deposits is not unusual: layer upon layer of floors, occupation levels, yards and rubbish pits, which together represent the remains of successive buildings – workshops, storehouses, byres and dwellings – their load-bearing timbers made of oak or ash, and their walls of birch wattle. The Perth High Street 1975–77 excavation was extraordinarily rich in artefacts and environmental evidence, providing a remarkably detailed picture of domestic and commercial life within a 12th- to 13th-century Scottish burgh. The soil conditions were often waterlogged and large quantities of organic material survived: over 6,000 pieces of leather alone; a wide range of wooden artefacts, including a French wine barrel; and the textiles included silk and hair. Over 50,000 sherds of pottery were recovered – probably the largest assemblage from a single site anywhere in Scotland. Numerous excavations in Perth through the 1980s and 90s have continued to furnish a wealth of evidence and opened windows on the past in sometimes surprising ways.

And yet, when Nick Bogdan and his team began their work at Perth High Street in 1975, they could not have foreseen the riches they would unearth – or that it would become Nick's life's work. In many ways Nick was ahead of his time. He surveyed the standing buildings on the site in meticulous detail, long before it was generally realised that this was an important aspect of urban archaeological work. He pioneered the use of job creation schemes in Scotland, seeing the potential they offered in enabling large-scale excavations to take place, while also offering youngsters the opportunity for employment. He recognised the impact that the

natural topography had on the history and growth of the burgh. His love of technology led him to embrace the use of computers in innovative ways long before this had become commonplace. He recognised early on that the results of his excavations warranted publication in a series of fascicules, which was not usual in Scotland in those days.

The Nick I knew was an entertaining companion, an unfailingly kind and considerate man, always enthusiastic, hugely knowledgeable in many areas, generous with both his time and knowledge, immensely loyal to his family and friends and, above all, a man fascinated by history and archaeology, and utterly dedicated to completion of the important work he started. In his latter years Nick found personal happiness when he embarked on a new project at the Bishop's Palace, Fetternear, with his partner Penny Dransart, and brought to it his customary scholarship and passion. But his commitment to Perth High Street never wavered. I never doubted that this project would be completed, and I have no doubt that Nick would have led its completion but for his untimely death at the age of 55.

It is a source of great sadness that Nick is not here to see this first volume in print. He would have been thrilled. He would also have been very aware of the great debt owed to all those volunteers, young people, archaeologists and specialists who worked with him, and those who have laboured long and hard in more recent years to bring the project to a successful conclusion.

I am delighted to welcome this first volume in the publication of Perth High Street 1975–77 archaeological excavations. There are another three fascicules to come, and all are now nearing publication. The completion of this important project is not only a credit to everyone who has been involved, but also a fitting tribute to Nick's memory.

Olwyn Owen
Historic Scotland

Obituary

Nicholas Quentin Bogdan 18 June 1947 to 15 August 2002



Illus 1 *Nicholas Q Bogdan shows Lord Ballantrae's party around the Perth High Street excavation. Photograph dated 23 September 1977.*

The life story of Nicholas Q Bogdan is intimately entwined with that of the Perth High Street excavation (Illus 1). An energetic and forceful personality, Nick, as he was known to his digging team, came to prominence in Scottish archaeology as the director of these explorations in rescue archaeology in 1975, having previously excavated with Professor Nicholas Brooks in St Andrews. His academic career had begun at Gordonstoun in Moray, then took him to Queen's University of Belfast, where he read archaeology, thence to St Andrews where his postgraduate research on the origins of castles became part of a lifelong passion. Nick's enthusiasms crossed the boundaries of history, archaeology, architecture, genealogy and many other '-ologies' besides: he was not limited by mere geography and always looked beyond, keen to place medieval Scotland in its wider European setting.

He was involved in the formation of a number of archaeological bodies, among them the Scottish Castle Survey and the Scottish Episcopal Palaces Project. From 1976 until 1982 he was a founder member of the Tayside and Fife Archaeological Committee (TAFAC), the group which brought together those involved in and supporting archaeology in Tayside and Fife.

Nick, though with one foot firmly in the past, had an ability to spot trends which he could usefully exploit in his work and was therefore always an enthusiastic user of new technology. 'New' in the 1970s meant the use of computers which utilised punch cards; by the 1990s he had advanced so far as to set up his own archaeological website. Publication however always seemed to lie somewhere just out of reach and although several interim reports of his work at Perth High Street were intermittently produced, the final drawing together of the great work was forever 'in progress' or 'forthcoming'.

In later years, his major post-Perth project was at Fetternear Bishop's Palace, where with boundless enthusiasm and the help of his collaborator and partner Dr Penny Dransart, through the auspices of the University of Wales, Lampeter, he excavated and researched until his untimely and sudden death, of a heart attack, at the age of 55.

A newspaper obituary (*Guardian*, 28 August 2002) described Nick's 'cheerful disdain for administration'. Perhaps so, but it is despite this, and all the vicissitudes of fortune of the last three decades, that the present volume is now offered as a tribute to his memory.