
PERTH HIGH STREET

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION

1975–1977

Fascicule 4

Living and working in a medieval Scottish burgh
Environmental remains and miscellaneous finds

Environmental remains

the late G W I Hodgson,

C Smith, A Jones, M Fraser, A K G Jones,

D Heppel, R Cerón-Carrasco, A S Clarke,

I H M Smart, R B Longmore and D McKay

Miscellaneous finds

A MacGregor, C Smith, M A Hall, J L Brown,

the late J B Kenworthy

J Hunter, G Dalglish

and the late N Q Bogdan

TAYSIDE AND FIFE ARCHAEOLOGICAL COMMITTEE

PERTH

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 these volumes 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 fourth volume in the publication of Perth High Street 1975–77 archaeological excavations. 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

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