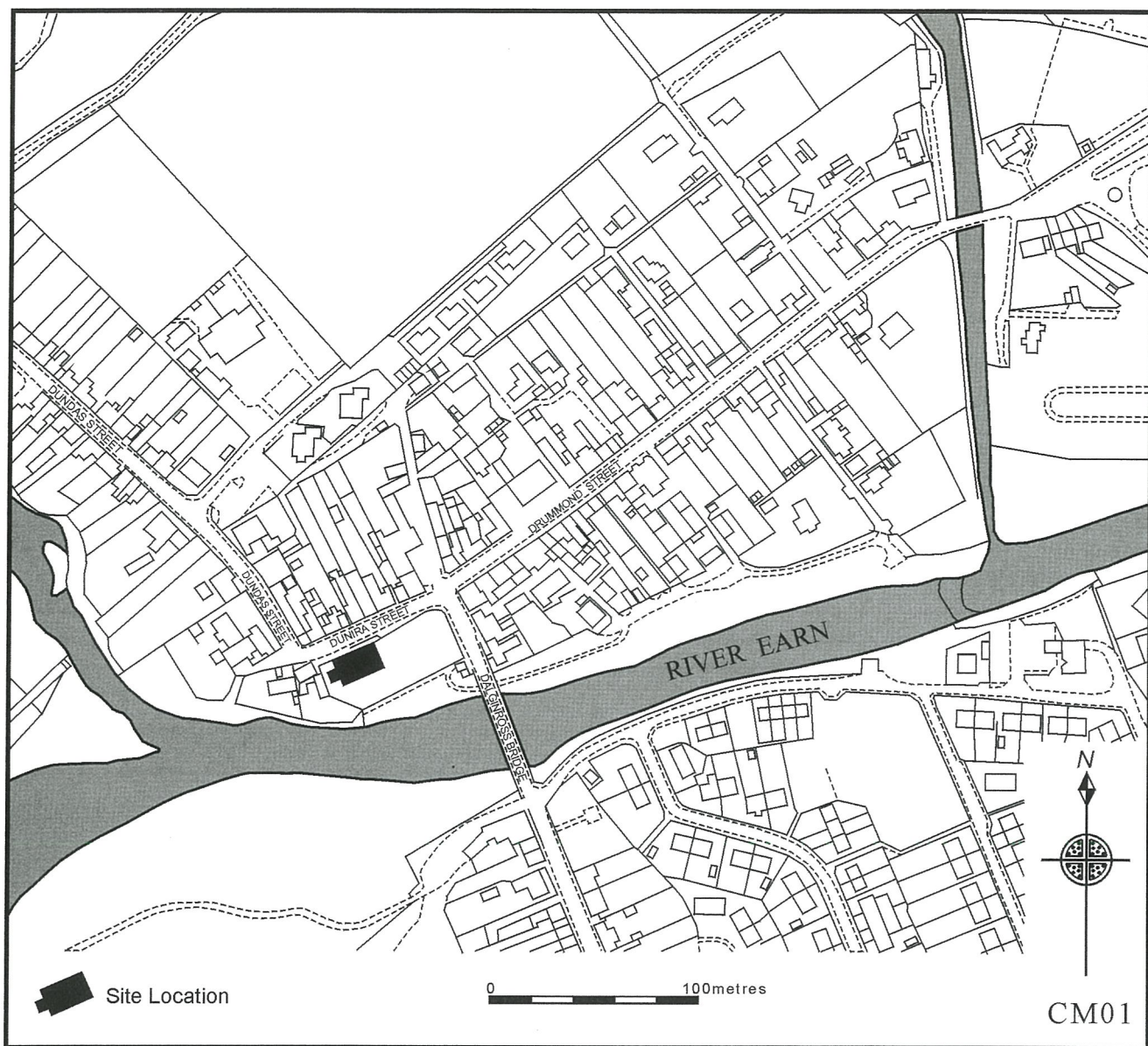




Illus 1 Site location.

Archaeological excavation at the White Church, Comrie

Ray Cachart and Adrian Cox

Introduction (Illus 1)

The Comrie Community Centre is housed in the former White Church located on the south side of Dunira Street at NGR NN 7728 2194. The White Church and its burial ground occupy a gravel terrace overlooking the River Earn, just to the west of Dalginross Bridge. The White Church was built in 1805 on the site of an earlier church and graveyard.

The former White Church has been completely renovated by the Comrie Community Centre Committee as part of a millennium project. A Desk-Based Assessment by SUAT had identified the need for archaeological investigation in the form of a watching brief on the general lowering of the floor level. It had also identified the potential need for hand excavation of a 3 x 3m lift-pit because of the possibility of burials and/or evidence of an earlier church building.

During the watching brief, it became apparent that the White Church had been built over the burial ground of the earlier church, as a quantity of disarticulated human bone was retrieved from deposits below the former floor level. However, the general below-floor reduction did not reach in situ burials. An initial evaluation at the lift shaft site in the form of a trial pit revealed some in situ human remains that would require archaeological excavation.

Historical background

The White Church, dedicated to St Kessog, was the former parish church of Comrie. The saint is represented in William Elphinstone's *Breviarium Aberdonense*, a hagiography of Scottish saints printed in Edinburgh in 1509/1510. St Kessog was venerated around Loch Lomand, at Auchterarder and elsewhere. An earlier source mentions a boyhood miracle and his burial at Luss (Macquarrie 1997 6,7,9). An independent parsonage in 1274/75 the parish church was appropriated to the support of a prebend in Dunblane cathedral before 1309 (Rogers 1992, 359).

Little is known of the history of the site prior to the building of the White Church in 1805. The Melville Castle Muniments contain papers that refer to the building of the White Church (Booth 1999, 8). The new church was needed to replace the existing one that was considered unsafe and inadequate for the population size. It was decided that the new church would be built immediately west of the existing church, together with as much of the churchyard as might be necessary. It appears that there was also a ruinous house and garden that had to be bought and cleared before building could begin (Ibid, 9). The information

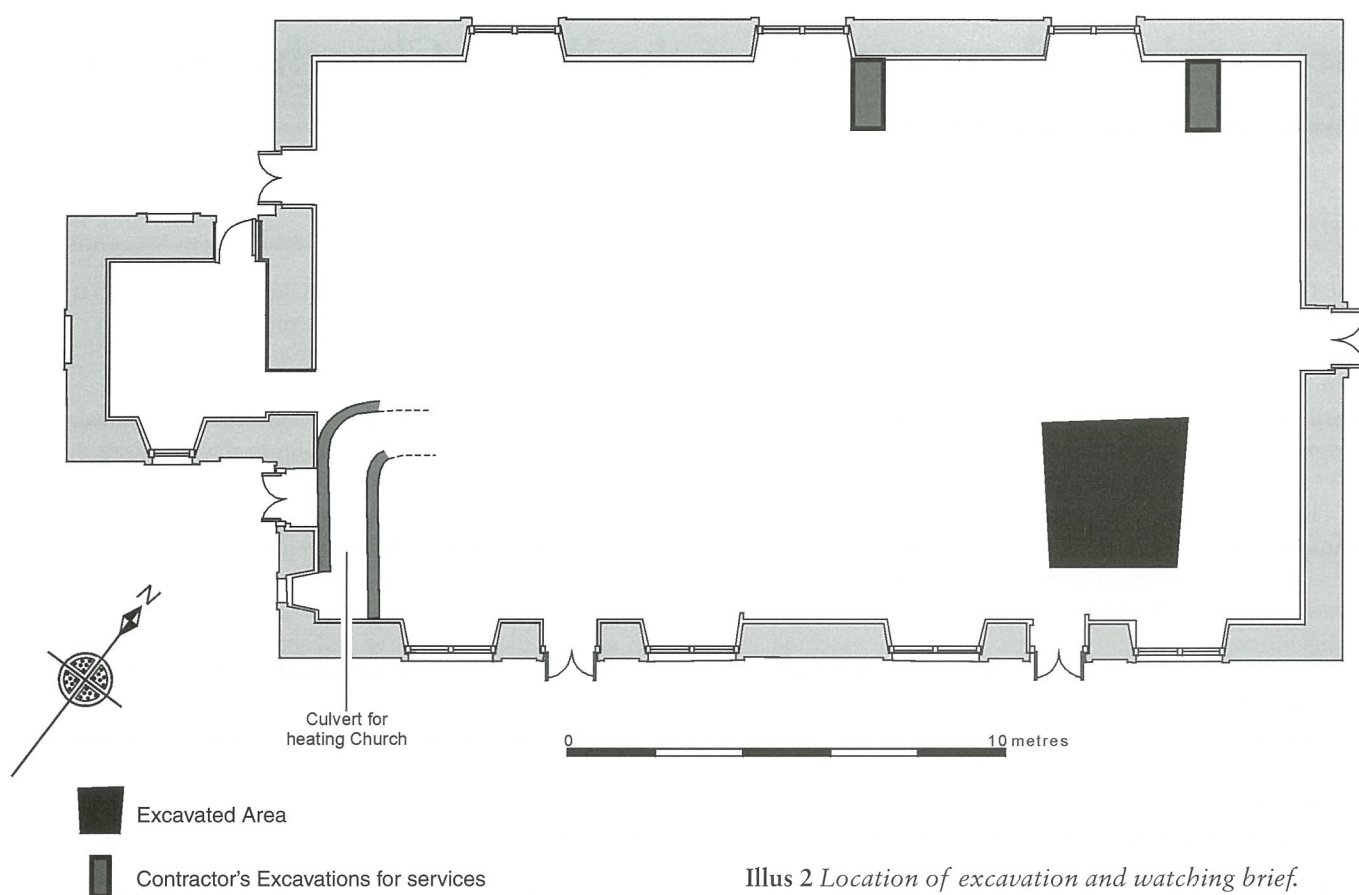
regarding the siting of the White Church indicates that it must have been built at least partially over the existing burial ground. There are two 17th-century gravestones within the burial ground: one, inscribed only W Mc 1682, is considered to have covered a grave, but the other, 1603, 'Heir Liis...John Forba (possibly Forbs or Forbes?), maister masoune' may be a memorial (ibid, 1). There are 23 stones dated between 1720 and 1801 to be found in the burial ground and there are also some plain hogbacked stones that could be even earlier (ibid 6,7).

A general idea of the size and shape of the pre-1805 church can be gleaned from General Roy's map of the Dalginross Roman camp, published in 1793 (Roy 1793 Pl. XI). It depicts 'Combrea Church' as being aisled on the north side and apparently located to the east and south of where the 1805 church would be built; Roy's location is the same as that indicated by the Melville Castle Muniments. Roy's map also shows the Church as being on the same alignment as the 1805 Church. The Church session records for the earlier church exist and in 1706 it is recorded that the session considered the building of a loft or balcony in the west end of the Church to accommodate more people (Booth 1999, 2). Also of great interest is the bell which formerly hung in the White Church tower and was last used in 1964; it is Flemish, inscribed and dated 1518 (Coulston, 1992). It is possible that the bell date could indicate the presence of a church on the site at that time. Physical evidence indicating a church on the site can therefore be traced back to at least the 1682 gravestone and tentatively to the 1518 bell; how long the site was used before that is not known. There was also some speculation that the mound on which the church stands could be man-made, similar to the tumuli by Ruchill water at Cultybraggan. The SUAT excavation has however found that it is apparently natural.

The watching brief (Illus 2)

Objectives

The main objective of the watching brief was to record and examine the remains of any other previous buildings or deposits relating to site use prior to the construction of the White Church that might be exposed or threatened by the reduction of the former floor levels inside the building. A secondary objective was to record any unknown, unusual or interesting features connected with the construction and development of the White Church.



Illus 2 Location of excavation and watching brief.

Method

The watching brief monitored the required ground reduction for the new floor level. Deposits were examined and sometimes partially excavated to establish their archaeological context.

The watching brief on the reduction of the floor level was carried out concurrently with the lift-pit excavation and was located mainly in the south-west quadrant of the church where plastic waste pipes were being removed. The watching brief started after the most recent floor, a layer of concrete, had been removed and while a mini-digger was reducing the level further.

Results

The general surface deposits comprised very disturbed loose, silty sand and abundant cobbles with some concrete and wood. In places a skin of pebbly mortar, possibly the surface of a solum under a former wooden floor, was observed. The pebbles may have represented the remains of an earlier floor. Below the loose material was a more compact sand with cobbles that contained disarticulated human bone. This deposit was considered to be disturbed burial ground soil. Some bone was appearing above the mortar solum level indicating a phase of burial ground disturbance after the main church construction. This material probably arrived here included in the general make-up and may have

derived from the construction of a culvert-like feature in the south-west corner of the church.

The culvert was 0.66m wide and aligned north to south for 4.50m before it curved to the east after which it was truncated. The culvert comprised low stone walls of horizontally laid slabs floored and roofed with flagstones. It had been backfilled with rubble over which mortar had been poured and some of the flagstones replaced. At the south end it was unroofed and filled with black ash and some building debris. The west wall of the culvert stopped 1.23m short of the church south wall. The east wall abutted the church south wall and was seen by a mark on the wall to have stood 2.90m high, so it must have also served as the east wall of a small room only 1.06m wide. This culvert was believed to be part of a hot air heating system with a stove or boiler located in the south-west corner of the church (hence the ash in the culvert backfill).

The contractors also undertook limited excavation against the east end of the north wall of the building to construct new drains that were being cut to a depth of about 1.50m. A small amount of articulated human bone was recovered from these excavations showing the northern extent of the burial ground.

Discussion

Although no in situ burials were found within the area of general ground reduction, the disarticulated human bone recovered confirmed that the White Church had

been built within the church yard of an earlier church. The contractor's formation level had reached burial ground soils in some instances. However, articulated human bone was found in the deeper excavations against the north wall, which showed that the burial ground had extended at least to the northern wall of the White Church.

There had been some disturbance of the below-floor levels that had resulted in burial ground deposits overlying the former church solum. This was considered to be the result of building an underfloor stone-lined culvert for heating the church. The culvert most probably contained hot water pipes, which were fed by a boiler in the south-west corner of the church. Records show that a stove was put into the church in 1845 and in 1914 new heating was agreed (Booth 1999, 16, 21). There are no details of how these operated.

The excavation (Illus 3 and 4)

Objectives

The main objective, once the presence of human remains was confirmed, was to archaeologically record and then sympathetically remove the bones for reburial.

It was also hoped to encounter and record the remains of other structures or archaeological deposits predating the White Church, as well as recording structural evidence of the White Church itself.

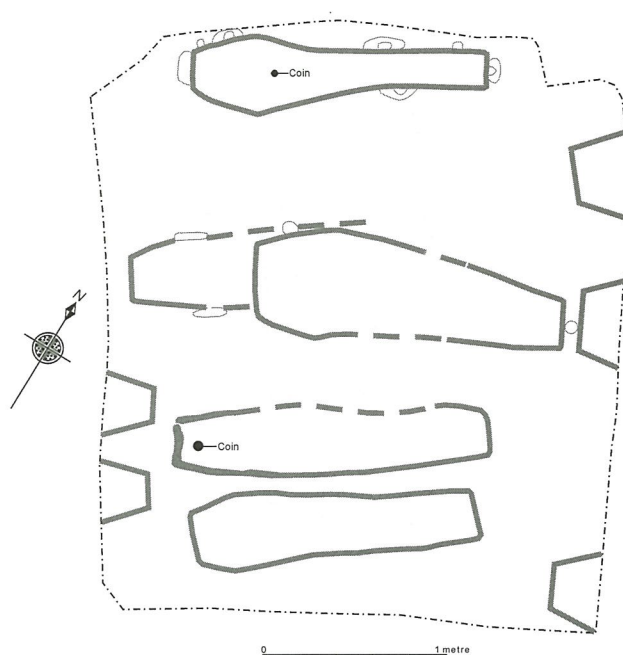
Method

The excavation for the lift-pit was located at the east end of the church, close to the south-east corner. After reaching the burial ground soil, the trench was extended slightly on the north, west and south sides, and an area measuring 3 x 3m was excavated down to undisturbed natural. An initial layer of rubble and a dwarf wall were removed by machine and the excavation continued by hand. All disarticulated human bone was collected and articulated remains in coffins were recorded in situ and removed to storage. All remains were later re-interred with an appropriate ceremony in the burial ground on the south side of the former church.

Excavation results

The natural deposits

The burials had been cut into natural river terrace deposits, comprising fine-banded sands, coarse sand and gravel with small to large cobbles and fragmented stone. Natural deposits were reached between OD 59.76m and 60.14m. The presence of the banded sands indicated that the mound on which the church stands was a natural feature and not man-made.



Illus 3 Location of coffins cut into natural.

Early burials

No complete early burials were found, as these had all been dug through by later coffined burials. Only in some instances was undisturbed articulated bone identified as belonging to earlier uncoffined burials. Occasionally some long bones and skulls had been gathered together and placed in a pit while digging a new grave. The disarticulated older remains were generally in much better condition than the later remains in coffins.

Cuts Into natural

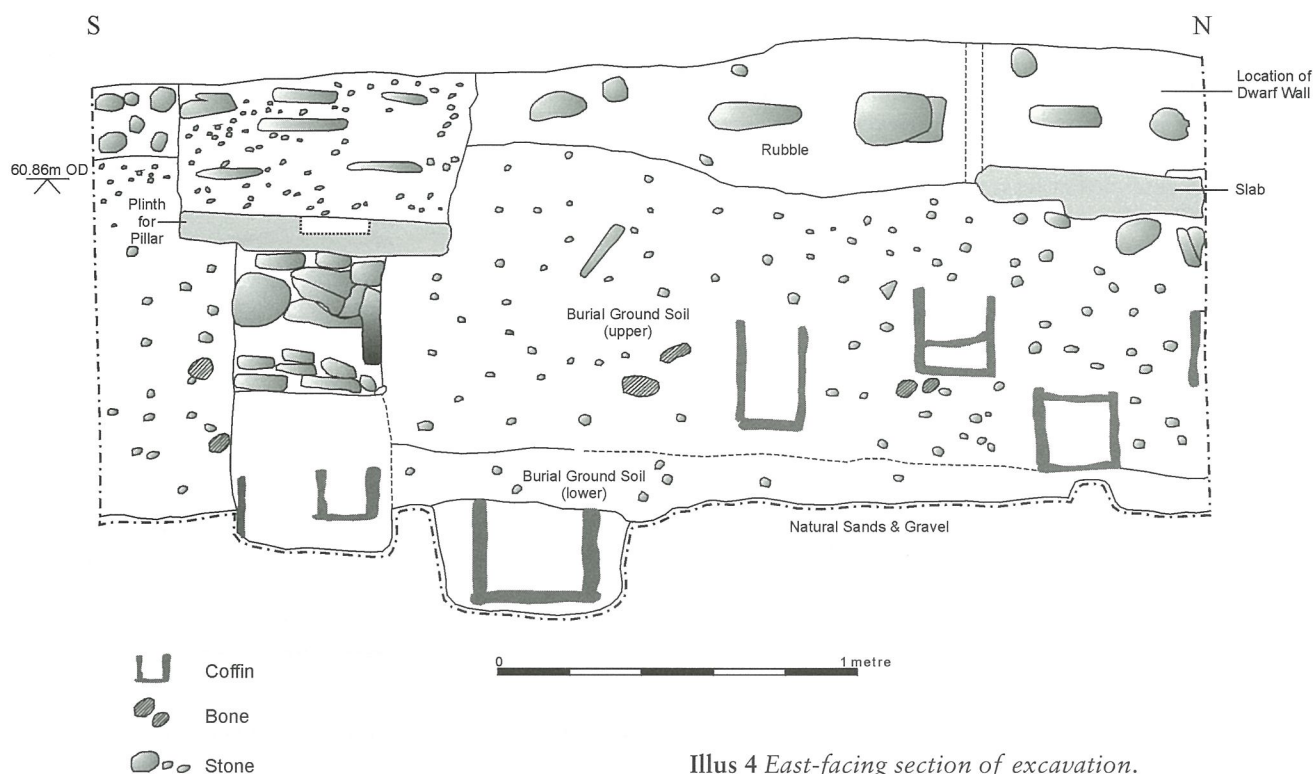
There was only one feature cut into the natural that was not deemed to be a cut for a coffin. This was a small rectangular pit measuring 0.33m across the top north to south and 0.13m deep. The fill was indistinguishable from the general burial ground soil. It may have been the bottom of a post-hole that at some stage was contemporary with the use of the burial ground.

Other cuts in the natural were on a general east-to-west alignment and contained the remains of coffined burials.

The coffined burials

Four entire coffined burials, all aligned on a basic east-to-west axis and cut into the natural, were recorded. These had been cut through earlier burials. The ends of several coffins projected from the east and west baulks. The coffined burials appear to have been arranged in north-to-south rows.

The coffins were of pine plank construction with fittings of iron rings and handles. They were intact, but



Illus 4 East-facing section of excavation.

in a bad state of decay. At least one coffin had the lid planks lengthways (east-to-west), while the casket planks were arranged breadthways. The human remains within the coffins were also generally in a poor state, friable, crumbling and breaking when moved. Most of the coffined burials also had a white deposit on the bones. This was either the result of the deliberate application of lime on the body before burial or the result of the decomposition of the body's fatty tissue (adipocere). Two of the complete burials contained a coin placed below the body.

The burial ground soils

Two burial ground soils, an upper and a lower, comprising sandy gravel were identified. Both were very similar in appearance, but the lower was somewhat less stony. The lower was 0.30–0.40m thick and the upper had a maximum thickness of 0.85m. These deposits had been much disturbed and churned over by continual processes of excavation and backfilling for burials. The deposits both contained abundant disarticulated bone and finds such as shroud pins, coffin nails, coffin handles and occasional coins.

White Church structural evidence

Structural features in the form of flat stone slabs, a wall and rubble make-up for the White Church were cut into or overlay the upper burial ground deposit. These features comprised the following:

i In the east-facing section at the north end a slab was set upon the upper burial ground soil. It measured 0.62m in length and 0.12m in thickness. This slab was probably part of a dwarf wall constructed for the White Church.

ii A roughly constructed dwarf wall, bonded with white mortar and aligned east-to-west, crossed the site near the northern side. It measured 0.45m in height and 0.40m in width. The lower part was rubble built while the upper part was constructed of roughly dressed stone. It was built on the burial ground soil. This wall was removed when the trench was extended to the north. One of the stones in the wall appeared to be a re-used transom fragment with faceted sides. It was rectangular in shape and measured 0.26 x 0.14 x 0.11m.

iii Abutting the dwarf wall was a spread of rubble make-up between 0.20m and 0.50m thick.

iv Abutting the dwarf wall on the south side at the west end and set on the rubble make-up was a stone slab with mortared rubble below, forming a block measuring 0.90 x 0.65 x 0.45m.

v A plinth or stone slab showing in the east-facing section at the south end measured 0.75m in length and 0.10m thick. It had a square socket incised on the upper surface, which measured 0.20 x 0.20m. The slab was not removed from the section. It was supported on a rubble foundation cut into the upper burial ground soil. Above the slab the cut had been backfilled with rubble containing plaster and mortar.

The artefacts (Illus 5 and 6)

Adrian Cox

A range of artefacts was recovered from the graveyard deposits. Some of these represent coffin fittings and furnishings, while others provide clues to burial attire and burial practice. The artefactual remains are dated by coin evidence to the late 17th or early 18th century.

The artefacts are described and discussed below within material categories. 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

Costume fittings

A small brooch or earring (Catalogue No 1) and a lace tag (No 2) possibly both represent components of personal clothing rather than of garments made specifically for burial. No 1 is of irregular (but almost pentagonal) outline, and this irregularity indicates that it may not have been worn as a pendant, having no obvious point of suspension. It may, however, have functioned as an earring. Alternatively, it may have been sewn onto clothing and worn as a brooch. Small decorative fittings like this may have been worn in groups rather than singly. The decoration resembles a vine or twine wrapped around the frame and it continues around both sides of the object.

Lace tags such as No 2, made from thin copper-alloy sheet, were used to terminate laces and thongs on a range of garments. They were in common use from the medieval period until the end of the 17th century for fastening a variety of items such as jerkins and long stockings (Cunnington and Cunnington 1972, 26, 160). This tag has open ends and an edge-to-edge seam.

1 Brooch or earring Length 21mm; max width 18mm; thickness 1mm
Costume fitting in the form of a flat ring with a broad, decorative band, slightly irregular in outline, but approximating to a pentagonal form. The asymmetrical decoration resembles a vine or twine wrapped around the frame.

Context 22; Find No 12. Illus 5

2 Lace tag Length 34mm; max thickness 3mm
Lace tag made from thin sheet, with an edge-to-edge seam.
Context 14; Find No 31. Illus 5

Pins

A large number of pins and pin fragments were recovered, including a group of 30 from one of the graveyard soils. All were made from drawn wire, their heads formed from a small wire coil, and are of a type commonly found in both medieval and post-medieval contexts. Pinching of the pin head to secure it to the top of the shaft is evident in many examples. The pins vary in size; many lying between 23mm and 28mm in length. There are at least two examples of a larger size

range, around 32–34mm in length (eg No 3), and No 4 is of a still larger size, at 50mm. There is, therefore, some degree of standardisation, but batches of pins would have exhibited slight variations in size until the later advent of mass-production techniques.

Almost all of the pins are straight, which may indicate that they were used to secure either burial attire or the internal furnishings of coffins. Coffin linings possibly required numbers of pins to hold them in shape, and the fabric coverings for coffins, introduced in the 17th century, were often decorated by numbers of pins in various patterns. Pins were possibly also used to secure burial shrouds, which may have been worn along with items of people's own personal clothing. Other garments made specifically for burial, such as decorative cloths to cover parts of the body, bonnets and padding, may also have been secured by pins, explaining the large numbers found. Ties (ribbons or bandages) were used to hold the legs of the deceased together (often at the ankles) and the arms to the sides of the body, partly to prevent excessive movement of the body while the coffin was in transit.

3 Pin Length 32mm; width of head 2mm; diameter of shaft 0.9mm

Complete pin with a pinched, wound-wire head and a circular cross-sectioned shaft. The pin has a white metal plating, probably of tin.

Context 14; Find No 30. Illus 5

4 Pin Length 50mm; width of head 3mm; diameter of shaft 1mm
Almost complete pin with a wound-wire head and a circular cross-sectioned shaft. Wire-drawing marks are visible along the length of the shaft, the tip of which is missing.

Context 14; Find No 24. Illus 5

5 Pin Length 25mm; width of head 1mm; diameter of shaft 0.7mm

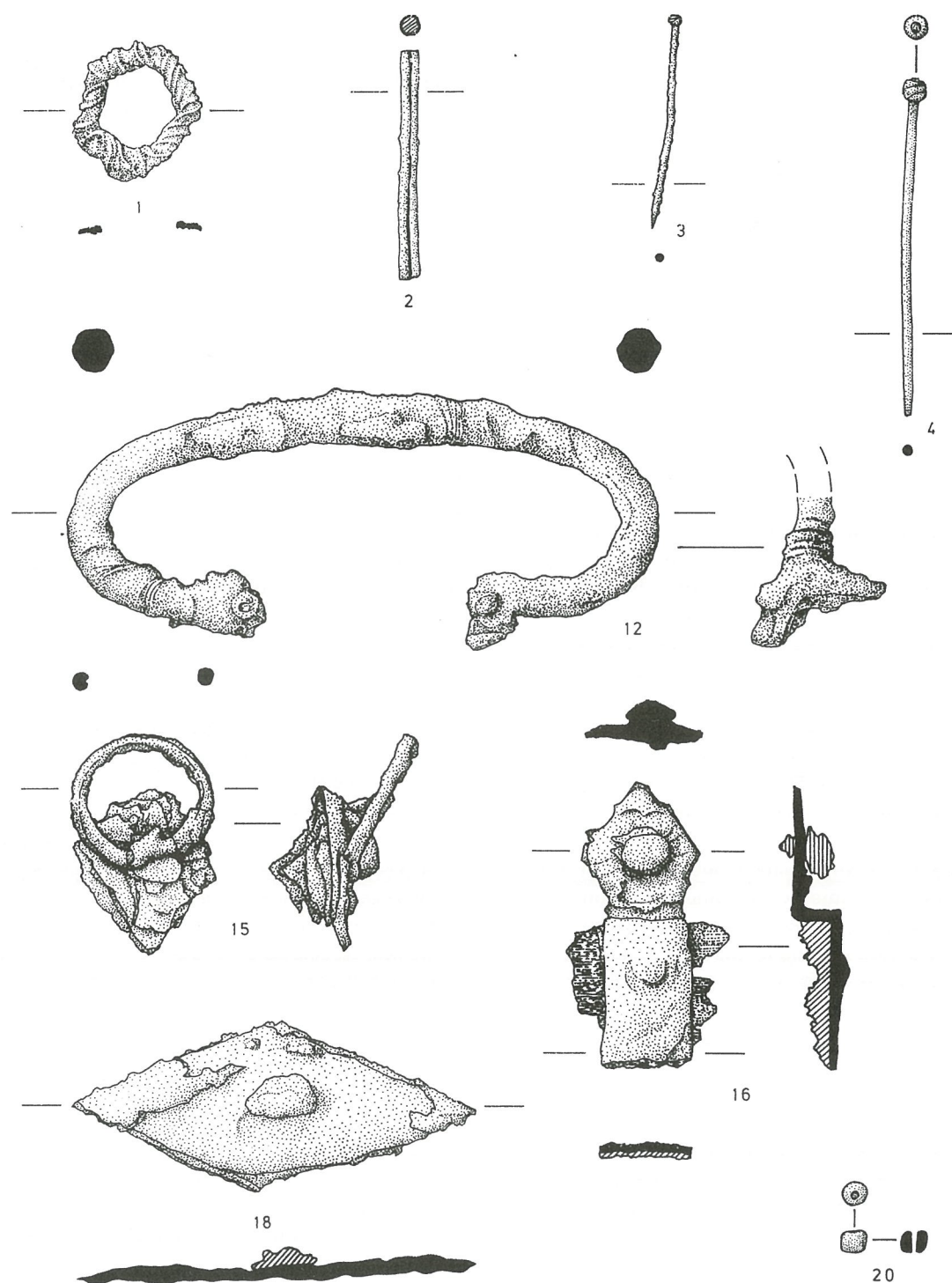
Complete pin with a pinched, wound-wire head and a circular cross-sectioned shaft. (Not illustrated)

Context 14; Find No 29a.

Coins

Ten coins were recovered mainly from the graveyard soil in close association with the coffined-burials. Two were recovered from within coffins, placed below the deceased. The placing of coins with the deceased is a very ancient custom and continues in recent times. A Victorian halfpenny was found placed upon the chest of a child burial at Kinnoull Church graveyard, Perth (Cachart 1995) and there are numerous other examples. Archaeological work in the Cathedral of Our Lady, Antwerp, revealed a large number of coins deliberately included with post-medieval coffined-burials (Veckman 1997, 74).

The fact that finds such as these generally involve small coins of low denomination leads to the assumption that the symbolic value of the coins was greater than their nominal one. Several theories have been advanced to explain the significance of coins placed in graves. For example, Livingstone (1996, 58) points to



Illus 5 Copper alloy objects, nos. 1–4, scale 1:1. Iron objects, nos. 12, 15, 16 & 18, scale 1:2. Glass object, no. 20, scale 1:1.

the custom of placing coins upon the eyelids of the deceased in order to keep the eyes closed, in case the departing spirit might seek a companion. The presence of coins can also be explained in terms of their usefulness as a payment for the deceased's crossing into the hereafter.

On three of the coins from the White Church (Nos 6–8) the dates of minting (1639, 1695 and 1697) are legible. In addition, a turner or bodle of Charles I (No 9) is of a

type in circulation between 1642 and 1648. Corrosion and wear on the remainder of the coins does not permit precise identification, however the surviving decoration and size of other examples indicates that these too fall within a 17th-century date range. Given that these coins probably circulated for some time prior to their deposition, they indicate a date range from the second half of the 17th century to the early 18th century for the burials. Identification is based on Seaby (1972, 89–100).

- 6 Turner** of Charles I. Copper, dated 1639. (Not illustrated)
Context 14; Find No 8.
- 7 Bodle** of William II (III of England). Copper, dated 1695. (Not illustrated)
Context 34; Find No 39.
- 8 Bawbee** of William II. Copper, dated 1697. (Not illustrated)
Context 14; Find No 2.
- 9 Turner or Bodle** of Charles I. Copper, 1642–8. (Not illustrated)
Context 14; Find No 8.

Iron coffin fittings

The coffins recorded during this investigation were of a flat-lidded, single-break type. Coffin grips (the correct term for handles) would have been placed at intervals around the outside of each coffin. A total of 26 grips were recovered and all are of a similar type, made from a circular cross-sectioned rod, curving to form an elongated oval shape. The most intact coffin recorded had two grips on each side and another at either end. While of broadly similar dimensions, the grips are not of exactly uniform size, with examples even from the same coffin varying in length by up to 10mm (eg Nos 10 and 11, below). The longest example recovered (No 12) is 170mm in length, although it is among the most slender. The grips were secured to the sides of the coffin by means of eye bolts, some examples of which survive, a few with fragments of wood attached to them.

Several grips (but not all) appear to have been tightly bound in a slender textile bandage, which survives partly in mineralised form on their surfaces. The bandages may have been applied to improve the grip afforded to the coffin bearers, perhaps especially on heavier coffins. Grant (1995, 369–70) records how coffins were often carried over great distances in the past to the place of burial and mourners took turns in carrying the coffin or bier. In the Highlands, there was a prejudice against using other forms of transport, even when they were available.

In addition to the grips, a series of iron loops was placed at intervals around the outside of each coffin. These appeared, from the evidence of the best-preserved coffin, to lie within the width of each grip. Once again there is a variation in size. Most examples (eg Nos 13 and 14) have external diameters of between 50–55mm, however one example is considerably smaller (No 15) and may be from a smaller coffin, possibly that of a child. Like the grips, the loops were secured to the coffin sides by means of eye bolts. A lozenge-shaped backing plate has survived along with No 15 and fragments of plates survive on other examples.

The function of these circular loops was different to that of the grips. While the grips were used by the bearers to carry the coffin to the graveside, the loops would have been used in lowering it into the grave by means of ropes.

Other iron fittings associated with the coffins include rectangular strips or brackets with a stepped profile (eg Nos 16 and 17) designed to secure the lid to the coffin's

sides. Most examples are rectangular, although one is of more decorative form, with a lozenge-shaped terminal. The terminals would have stood proud of the coffin's sides until the lid was fitted into position. The form of the brackets indicates that the lids were a little narrower than the maximum exterior widths of the coffins, resting on top of the coffin sides, but not overlapping them. Each bracket was attached to the side of the coffin by means of a slender nail, while the lid was attached by means of broader, more decorative nails with domed, circular heads. An imprint of finely-woven textile survives within the corrosion products on the exterior surfaces of some of the brackets, possibly indicating that a mort cloth was draped over the coffin and decayed in situ.

A lozenge-shaped plate (No 18) was probably attached to the lid or side of a coffin, and appears to be a purely decorative motif. The plate appears to be plain, although the face is heavily corroded and any inscription would have been lost. It was attached by means of a centrally-set shank that was broken, leaving its tip in the wood.

- 10 Coffin grip** Length 165mm; width 75mm; max diameter 14mm
Grip made from a circular cross-sectioned rod, curving to form an elongated oval shape. The ends of the rod taper slightly, passing through circular iron loops, before angling inwards at 90 degrees and becoming more rectangular in cross-section. Evidence survives of a narrow textile bandage (width circa 6mm) having been wound around the handle, where it decayed in situ. (Not illustrated)
Context 41; Find No 48.
- 11 Coffin grip** Length 156mm; width 70mm; max diameter 14mm
Description as for No 10, above. (Not illustrated)
Context 41; Find No 49.
- 12 Coffin grip** Length 170mm; width 62mm; max diameter 14mm
Description as for No 10, above.
Context 32; Find No 14. Illus 5
- 13 Loop** External diameter 54mm; thickness 6mm
Circular loop, with an eye bolt looped around it. The point of the eye bolt has been pushed or hammered through a thin iron plate, only a fragment of which survives. A fragment of wood is attached to the rear of this plate. (Not illustrated)
Context 19; Find No 52.
- 14 Loop** External diameter 50mm; thickness 6mm
Description as for No 13, above. (Not illustrated)
Context 19; Find No 53.
- 15 Loop** External diameter 40mm; thickness 4mm
Circular loop, with an eye bolt looped around it. The point of the eye bolt has been pushed or hammered through a thin, lozenge-shaped iron plate (length 50mm; width circa 38mm; thickness 2mm). A fragment of wood is attached to the rear of this plate. Illus 5
Context 19; Find No 53.
- 16 Bracket** Length 84mm; width 25mm; thickness (excluding bolt) 2mm
Bracket consisting of a stepped plate with a lozenge-shaped

terminal. A nail or bolt, with a domed, circular head (diameter 13mm), has been hammered through the centre of the terminal. A smaller nail has been hammered through the rectangular part of the bracket and a fragment of wood, running in a transverse direction to that of the bracket's long axis, is attached to the protruding nail shaft. Illus 5
Context 14; Find No 51.

- 17 Bracket** Length 74mm; width 26mm; thickness (excluding bolt) 2mm
Bracket consisting of a stepped plate of rectangular outline. A nail or bolt, with a domed, circular head (diameter 13mm) has been hammered through the centre of the terminal. A smaller nail has been hammered through the lower part of the bracket and fragments of wood, running in a transverse direction to that of the bracket's long axis, are attached to the rear. (Not illustrated)
Context 32; Find No 44.

- 18 Plate** Length 114mm; width 47mm; thickness of plate 2mm; thickness including shank 9mm
Plate of slightly asymmetrical, lozenge-shaped outline, with a broken, centrally-set, square cross-sectioned shank. Wood remains survive around the shank and at the corners of the plate. Heavily corroded.
Context 14; Find No 50. Illus 5

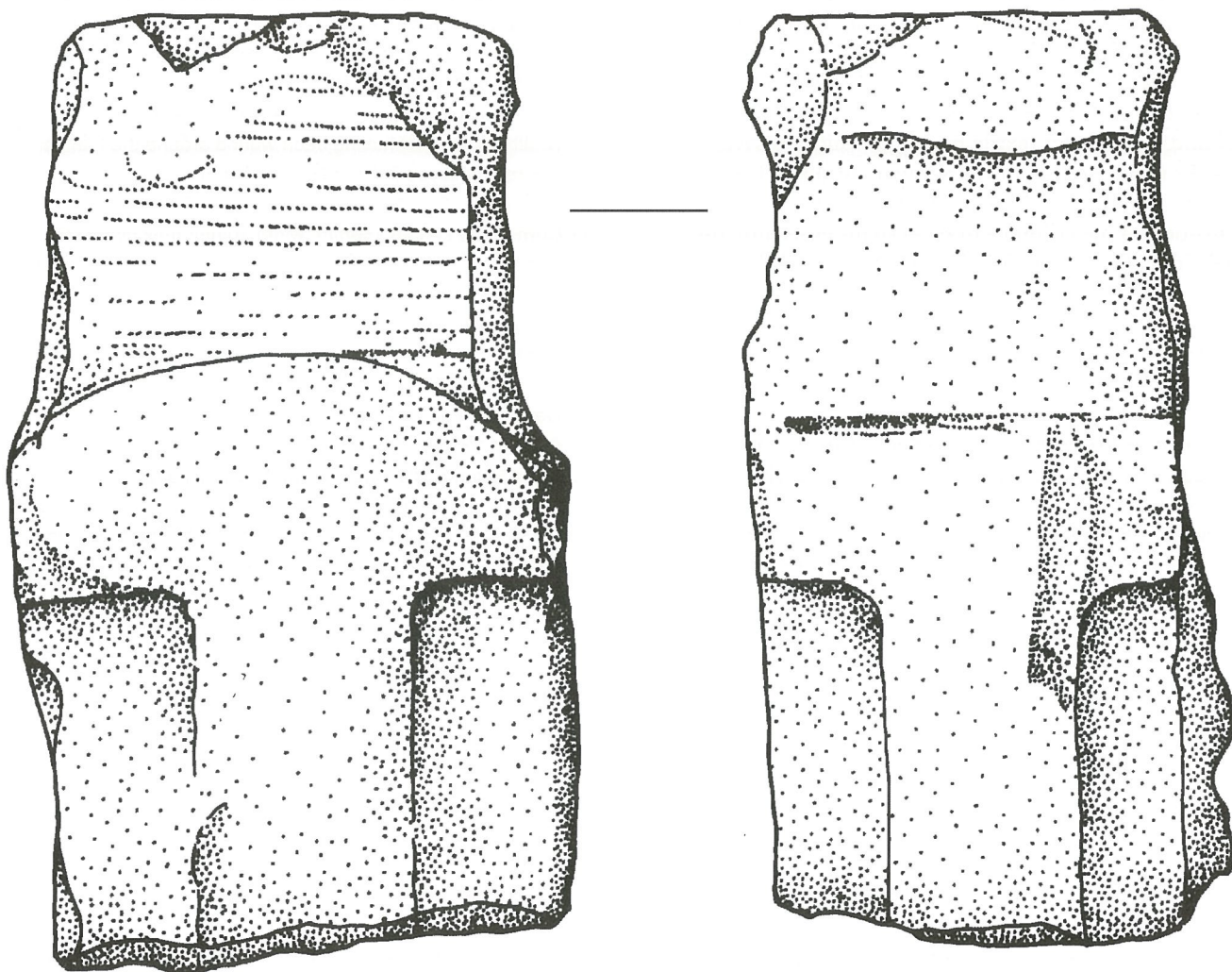
Stone building material

A transom fragment (No 19) was re-used in a dwarf wall within the White Church. This fragment may represent evidence of an earlier structure on or near the site of the church. A small number of roof slate fragments were recovered from the graveyard soil deposits.

- 19 Transom fragment** Length 257mm; width 146mm; max thickness 113mm
Transom fragment with bevelled faces, broken at one end. Mortar adheres to one of the broader faces and tool marks appear on parts of the fragment's surface.
Context 12; Find No 42. Illus 6

Glass

A bead of translucent, pale blue glass (No 20), like the small copper alloy brooch or earring described above (No 1), probably represents evidence of burial with items of personal adornment or keepsakes. Necklaces of glass beads were especially popular in the 17th and 18th centuries.



Illus 6 Stone transom fragment. Scale 1:2.

20 Bead Length 2mm; diameter 3mm

Small bead of translucent, pale blue glass, circular in outline, with a central, circular perforation (diameter 0.9mm).

Context 24; Find No 40. Illus 5

Organic material

A quantity of wood shavings was recovered from the interior of one of the coffins. This probably served as padding or lining material in the base of the coffin and may have been preferred because of its absorbent qualities and easy availability to the joiners who manufactured the coffins. Similar material was recorded in one of the coffins excavated at Kinnoull Church graveyard in Perth (Cox 1998, 292). Fragments of wood from the lids and sides of coffins were also retained.

Discussion

The excavation found burials aligned in the traditional Christian manner (head facing east) which confirmed that the 1805 White Church had been built over the burial ground of an earlier church, effectively sealing the underlying archaeological levels. The general burial alignment was not strictly east-to-west but slightly out, tending more towards a north-east to south-west line. This alignment was virtually the same as that of the White Church, which initially seemed to suggest that burials had taken place within the church, although there is no record of this happening. It appears that the burials were aligned with the former church and that the White Church was built on the same alignment. Alignment of the church and burials were probably influenced by the course of the River Earn that runs parallel with the site.

It was not possible to establish a comprehensive date range for all of the burials. That the burial ground had been used intensively for a long period was evidenced by the large amount of disarticulated bone recovered, indicating recurrent burials. The in situ coffined-burials were cut through earlier burials and into undisturbed natural and must have occurred prior to the construction of the White Church in 1805. However, coins from the burial ground soil and two within coffins had a date range from around the 1630s until about the 1690s (see coins, above). One coin with a coffin burial was dated 1697. All of the coins were well worn and must have been in circulation for some thirty years or so. Adjusting for circulation time, the 1697 coin could indicate a deposition dated of around 1730.

With regard to the construction of the White Church, the burial ground topsoil was not evident and must have been removed for the church construction and the ground then stabilised and made up with rubble. The dwarf wall no doubt supported a wooden floor, but whether or not this was the original floor is

not known, usually a church of this period would have been built with a flagstone floor. The slab below the dwarf wall may be a remnant of such a floor. The stone slab along the edge of the west baulk with the incised square was most probably supporting a pillar for the gallery known to be located here. The function of the other flat slabs is somewhat less certain.

General conclusions

From the results of the archaeological investigations it can be concluded that the White Church was built over a burial ground associated with an earlier church. The earliest datable object, a 1639 coin of Charles I found in the burial ground deposits, would indicate that burials were taking place at least around 1670 and very likely much earlier. No in situ remains of an earlier church were found, and the only physical evidence of a former church on the site was the re-used transom recovered from the dwarf wall of the White Church. The burial ground was seen to have extended at least to the north wall of the White Church. The excavation also revealed that the mound occupied by the White Church and burial ground is a natural gravel terrace and not man made.

Acknowledgements

The watching brief and excavation were jointly funded by Historic Scotland and the Comrie Community Centre Committee. SUAT Ltd would also like to thank Bob Gunn of the James Denholm Partnership, Comrie, for his co-operation and on-site assistance throughout this project. Adrian Cox thanks Fraser Stewart for his assistance with the coin identifications.

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Abstract

During the period 2nd–12th November 1999, SUAT Ltd carried out a small excavation and a watching brief (SUAT site code CM01) inside the Comrie Community Centre, formerly the White Church, at Dunira Street, Comrie, Perth and Kinross (NGR NN72 219). The archaeological work was commissioned by James Denholm Partnership, Comrie, on behalf of their clients the Comrie Community Centre Committee, in response to the recommendations of a desk-based archaeological assessment produced by SUAT Ltd in September 1999. The watching brief revealed some structural evidence for the White Church and recovered disarticulated human bone from pre-White Church burial ground deposits. Four articulated burials and artefactual evidence in the form of shroud pins, coffin fittings and coins were recovered from the excavation. A fragment of transom probably from an earlier church was found reused in a dwarf wall for the White Church floor. All the human remains were later reinterred in the graveyard on the south side of the Church.

Keywords

coffin furniture
human remains
St Kessog

This paper was published with the aid of a grant from Historic Scotland.