

Desk-top survey of Dunfermline Abbey Burial Grounds: timelines, map regression and image search

## Dunfermline Abbey Burial Grounds Desk-top Survey

### 1.0 Background

Fife Council commissioned Kirkyard Consulting in April 2019 to conduct a desktop survey of Dunfermline Abbey's churchyard. This forms part of a broader assessment of the cultural significance and conservation needs of the churchyards at Dunfermline Abbey.

This programme supports a wider aim of Fife Council and other key stakeholders<sup>1</sup> to research and better interpret the Abbey churchyard for visitors.

### 1.1 Aim

The Desktop Survey seeks to:

- Produce timelines for historically-significant events relating to death, burials and commemoration;
- Illustrate the churchyards' development;
- Identify points of interest for further investigation during field assessment;
- To provide evidence to assess cultural significance, including evidential value and interpretative potential, of the burial landscapes and their individual features;

### 1.2 Method Statement

Principal sources consulted in developing this desktop survey included research by local historians, Sue Mowat and Dr Jean Barclay in addition to published academic research. This included papers within *Royal Dunfermline* as well as research by Dr Michael Penman and reports of excavations within the Abbey Precincts.

The quality and coverage of existing research carried out by local historians meant that it was possible to draw up detailed timelines without examining primary sources such as Heritors Meeting Minutes and Kirk Session records directly.

Primary research included historic mapping of Dunfermline and the Abbey, documents within the National Record of Scotland, the Ordnance Survey Object Name Book, archival material held within CANMORE and resources held by the Local Studies Collection in Dunfermline Library.

The Desktop Survey consulted heritage management records (Historic Environment Scotland Scheduling, Listing and CANMORE entries) and an image search reviewed drawings, photographs, and postcards within the SCRAN, CANMORE and St Andrews University Special Collections archives as well as digital resources such as eBay. A bibliography of the sources consulted is appended.

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<sup>1</sup> Historic Environment Scotland, Dunfermline Abbey Parish Church, Stirling University

### 1.3 Structure

There are three locations where burial and commemoration took place at Dunfermline Abbey:

1. The Abbey Church (or its footprint)
2. The open ground to the north of the Abbey Church
3. The burial sections laid out to the south and east of the Abbey Church.



Figure 1 Site Overview

A detailed chronology for each of the three areas is set separately out below (parts 2, 3, and 4). The key dates for site development can be summarised as:

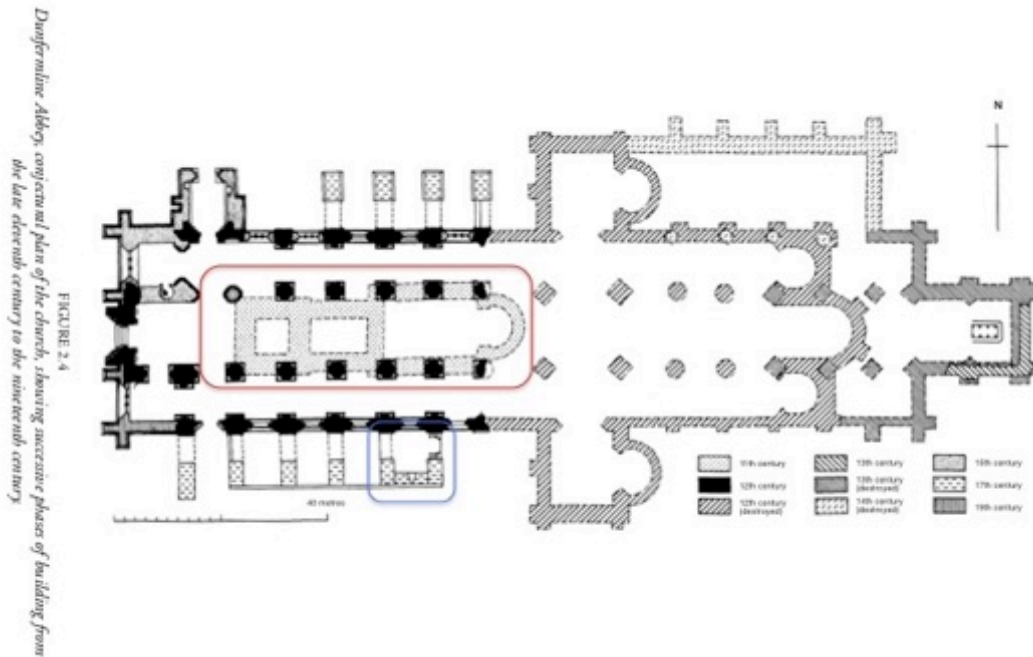
1050	The first, small church is built by Malcolm III and Queen Margaret
1128	This church it is rebuilt on a grand scale by David I and elevated to the status of an abbey
1150	The Old Churchyard to the north of the Abbey Church is used for townspeople's' burials, with the monks buried in a small area south of the Abbey Church beside the cloisters
1560	After the Reformation, the Satur Churchyard opens within the footprint of the Conventual Church which over time falls into ruin
1816	Satur Churchyard closes to allow the ground to be used to build the current Abbey Parish Church
1818	Robert the Bruce's tomb is found when building the new church
1823	The New Churchyard opens to the East and South of the Abbey Church
1896	Closure of churchyards to new burials

## 2.0 The Abbey Church and Its Footprint

### 2.1 Overview

The development of Abbey Church is particularly complex for several reasons:

- It subsumed within its footprint an earlier, smaller church that potentially may have had associated burials (pre-12<sup>th</sup> century) to north and south although no documentary or archaeology evidence has been recovered to support this hypothesis.

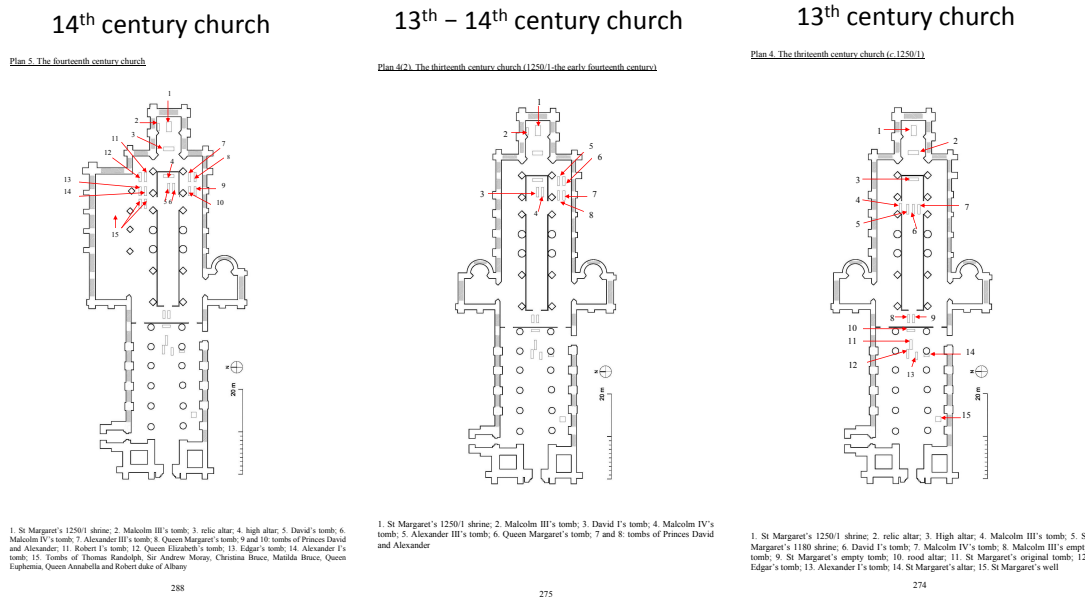


Extracted from Richard Fawcett 'Dunfermline Abbey Church' in Fawcett (ed) *Royal Dunfermline*, 2005

Figure 2 Dunfermline Abbey, conjectural plan of the church showing successive phases of building from the late eleventh century to the nineteenth century

- This site was used for royal burials for almost 400 years. This was not simply concerned with the disposal and commemoration of the dead but would embody a dynastic and in some cases a devotional dimension to their burial and commemoration.
- The smaller church contained the earliest royal burials. However, as this church and the Abbey Church developed the setting, and in some cases the location, of these royal burials also changed. The limited nature of the surviving documentary and material evidence makes it difficult to clearly understand this process.

Positions of Royal Tombs, Shrines and Altars



Extracted from SangDong Lee (2014).The Development of Dunfermline Abbey as a royal cult centre c.1070-c.1420, unpublished PhD, Stirling University

Figure 3 Placement of shrines and royal tombs over the 13<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> centuries

- The Abbey Church itself was divided into two discrete spaces; the nave, which served as the parish church, and the Coventual Kirk (choir and sanctuary), which was used by the monks. Royal burials were ultimately focussed within the Coventual Kirk. High status non-royal individuals would have been buried in the nave, although little research has been carried out on this topic<sup>2</sup>.
- Following the Reformation, the Coventual Kirk was allowed to decay and its footprint, known as the Satur Churchyard, was used for burials
- In 1818, the Satur Churchyard was built over to create a new parish church. These building works revealed the remains of Robert the Bruce and these survive within the current parish church. The former parish church, within the nave of the Abbey Church, passed into state care and is managed today by Historic Environment Scotland along with other areas within the abbey and palace complex.
- Sources use a variety of terms to describe individual areas:

<sup>2</sup> E.g. James Frederick Skinner Gordon (1875) *Ecclesiastical Chronicle for Scotland* noted besides the Royal Remains, there were Interred in Dunfermine Abbey the following persons of note and renown: Malcolm, Earl of Fife; Andrew, Bishop of Caithness; Earl and Countess of Athol; Thomas Randolph, Earl of Murray, a.d. 1832; Robert, Duke of Albany, &c. Robert Henryson, "Scholciuaister and Poet."; Robert Pitcairn, Secretary of State; William Schaw, "Maister of the King's Wark."; Elizabeth Wardlaw, Authoress of "Hardycanute."; Rev. Thomas Gillespie, founder of the "Relief Church." This is besides a long list of Abbots, Priors, Monks, and Abbey Officials.

- The Satur Churchyard was variously known as Psalter, Settir, or Satyr Churchyard or burial ground. Other names used include the Sither-Kirkyard or St Salvatore Churchyard.
- The Coventual Kirk is also referred to as the Choir or Monks Church.
- The first Abbey Church Parish Church is also referred to as the Nave or Old Nave.

For consistency and to reflect the church's status, the terms used in this report are Satur Churchyard, Coventual Kirk, Nave and New Parish Church.

## 2.2 Timeline

### Medieval Period

#### Early church: royal burials

- c.1070 Church of the Holy Trinity built by Malcolm III and Queen Margaret. A small community of Benedictine monks take up residence.
- 1093 Margaret died and was buried within the church. Malcolm killed at the Battle of Alnwick and buried in Tynemouth Priory.
- c. 1100 King Edgar (1097-1107) extends the building before his own burial within the church.
- 1107-1124 Malcolm's body reburied within the church.
- 1124 Alexander I buried within the church.

#### Abbey Church: expansion, more royal burials, movement of Queen Margaret's remains, Robert the Bruce

- 1128 Under David I (1124-53) the church is elevated to abbey status and rebuilt on a grand scale in the standard arrangement of a nave, chancel and a sanctuary with a semi-circular apse.
- 1150 The Abbey Church dedicated to St Mary.
- 1153 David I is buried within the church.
- 1165 Malcolm IV buried (David I's grandson) within the church.
- 1180 Queen Margaret's remains moved to north side of the high altar.
- 1249 Queen Margaret canonised by Pope Innocent IV.
- 1250 Queen Margaret's remains moved to a new shrine chapel at the east end of the church<sup>3</sup>.
- 1286 Alexander III is buried.
- 1303 Abbey buildings damaged by Edward I of England's troops.
- 1329 Before his death, King Robert Bruce (1306-29) adds to the rebuilding of the abbey and was the last sovereign buried<sup>4</sup> at the site (although seven members of the royal family were buried here including Robert duke of Albany d.1420 and Prince Robert, infant son of James VI d.1602).

### Post-Reformation

#### 16<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> centuries: Satur Churchyard, Church burials, Coventual Church collapse, final royal burials, first antiquarian investigation of 'royal burials'

<sup>3</sup> All that now remains of is the foundation stone of St Margaret's shrine and the bases of its surrounding walls.

<sup>4</sup> Bruce's heart was buried at Melrose Abbey.

- 1560 Post-Reformation the Nave (west) continued as the parish church and the Conventual Kirk (east) abandoned to eventually become a ruin.  
St Margaret's relics smuggled to Spain, where they are later lost.  
Kirk Session minutes include the earliest surviving reference to the Satur Churchyard.
- 1563 By now the choir is roofless, with the only substantial upstanding remains being sections of the north transept and the north wall of the north choir chapel.
- 1577 The General Assembly hears a complaint that Lord Rosyth was buried within the church, the Clerk of Register blamed the town's provost and Baillies<sup>5</sup>.
- 1587 Act of Annexation brings Dunfermline Abbey under Crown control.  
Burial vault for Queen Anne of Denmark<sup>6</sup> built against the south wall of the nave (second and third bays from the east, in what had formerly been the north cloister - see figure 2).
- 17<sup>th</sup> century By now the former choir used as a burying ground.
- 1602 Queen Anne's third son, Robert, dies shortly after birth and becomes the last member of Scotland's royal family to be buried at Dunfermline.
- 1603 James VI moves his court to London following the Union of the Crowns.
- 1605 Queen Anne leaves Dunfermline for London. The palace is left to decay.
- 1616 The vault on the nave's south wall, intended for Queen Anne, passes to the Wardlaws of Pitreavie.
- 1620-25 The old nave gradually fitted out for Protestant worship.
- 1642 Lady Rosyth's request for a burial place in 'the common aisle' of the parish kirk for the lairds of Rosyth refused by Presbytery and Kirk Session on the grounds it contravenes the Acts of the General Assembly.
- 1654 Kirk Session minutes give costs and terms for burial within the 'Old Kirk' i.e. the Satur Churchyard<sup>7</sup>.
- 1660 The Kirk Session minutes describe a physical standoff between the Ministers and friends and family of Laird (Stewart) of Rosyth, supported by town officials, when they attempted to bury him within the parish church.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Chalmers Vol. 1 P134

<sup>6</sup> Queen Anne was wife of King James VI and was eventually buried in London, rather than Dunfermline.

<sup>7</sup> 'Some desire to be buried in the old kirk [Satur burial ground], that those who were not in use to have a burial place there and shall hereafter be buried there, for each person that shall be buried shall pay 5 merks. And if they seek it to them and theirs, shall pay twenty pounds [purchase family plot]. Without prejudice to the session to augment according to the quality of the persons as they think fit. And in case their successors to their lands shall seek the same, that they enter upon the same terms. And this without prejudice to them who have burials there before and have been in use to have burial there'.

<sup>8</sup> Documents are unclear on whether Laird (Stewart) of Rosyth was buried in the church or not ADD REF



- 1666 -1683 Mr George Walker, custodian of the Abbey, removes 130 loads of stone from the Abbey ruins.<sup>9</sup>
- 1672 Part of the eastern end choir is blown down.
- 1716 The central lantern tower collapses after grave digging damages the foundations on its northern side.
- 1723 Historical sources suggest 6 'royal' grave slabs and part of Queen Margaret's tomb<sup>10</sup> (see also entry for 1771) visible at this time amongst churchyard ruins.
- 1726 The east gable crumbles.
- 1753 A turnpike tower adjoining the northeast end of the parish church collapses and the transept crumbles. Heritors and town magistrates inspected the ruins<sup>11</sup> deciding to rousp the fallen stonework. A local baker secures the right to remove and sell the tumbled stones.
- 1754 The Kirk Session allocates burial space within Satur Churchyard's to Dr Barclay<sup>12</sup>.
- 1766 Antiquarian investigation of the abbey remains describe 6 'elite' graves (see also entry for 1723)<sup>13</sup>.  
Repairing Mr Mathieson's garden wall, workmen discover chamber and uncover a burial of a female figure all in gold. Disintegrates quickly<sup>14</sup>.
- 1771 A plan depicts the location of the group of 6 'royal / elite' graveslabs at the north east end of the Satur Churchyard and Margaret's shrine to the east end. The dogleg at the west end of the south wall indicates the site follows the outline of the south transept (see Figure).  
Request by Rev. Mr. Thomson, Minister and owner of a family burial area within the Satur Churchyard, that a specific area of ground be set-aside him and subsequent ministers<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Walker held this role as Chamberlain of the Regality of Dunfermline but was admonished by his employer, the Marquis of Tweeddale, for exceeding his authority by removing stone for his own purposes.

<sup>10</sup> Fernie 1815 notes: And on the northsyd of the monastrie, stood a very stately Church, of old Gothick work, now all ruinous, except the west end thereof, which makes a large parochial Church. On the north syde of the remains of the nave of the said Church, lye buried, King Malcolm, Kanmore; Edgar, Alexander the fierce, and St. David, his three Son's ; Malcolm the Maiden, his grandchild, and Alexander the third; all Kings of Scotland. Before the pulpit of the Church presently used, lyes King Robert Bruce, and in the Quire of the old Church, before the high altar, lyes St. Margaret, Queen to King Malcolm Kanmore; all under marble Stones. See also Henderson p 7.

<sup>11</sup> Heritors records note the need to repair the north wall of the Satur churchyard, pend (vaulted ceiling of the transept's ground level) and a gate (north doorway into the transept / Satur Churchyard known as the 'black yett') the all of damaged by the fall.

<sup>12</sup> The Kirk Session minutes record the allocation of burial space to Dr Barclay is documented; no full record of the Satur Churchyard's burial plot owners and grave locations survive (or was compiled). However, the Kirk Session records occasionally noted names of some lair owners. Many graves belonged to the leading heritors.

<sup>13</sup> Cited in Penman (2009) p10, 11, OSA

<sup>14</sup> Cited in Ordnance Survey Object Name Book

<sup>15</sup> Rev. Mr. Thomson, Minister, reported that some time ago, on the death of his late wife, he took possession of a burying place of about seven grave breadths on what was formerly the Eastern part of the Church, now commonly called the Psalter Churchyard, and expressed his desire that the Session would set apart and appoint the said ground to be a burying place for him, and his successors in office of Minister of

Burial of the 7<sup>th</sup> Earl of Elgin's father and elder brother accidentally disturb elite medieval female remains<sup>16</sup>.



Extracted from 1771 plan reproduced in DHCP (nd). The New Churchyard 1807-1925 consulted online [https://www.dunfermlineheritage.org/uploads/1/5/6/2/15623980/the\\_new\\_churchyard.pdf](https://www.dunfermlineheritage.org/uploads/1/5/6/2/15623980/the_new_churchyard.pdf)

**Figure 4** Extract from a 1771 plan of Dunfermline showing the footprint of the Satur Churchyard and location of '6 Kings interred and St Margaret's tomb'.

- 1787 Robert Burns visits, kisses one of the 'royal' grave slabs thinking marks the grave of King Robert Bruce.<sup>17</sup>  
The first fragments from an alabaster tomb, later believed to be from Bruce's grave, are recovered.
- 1794 Contemporary sources describe the 6 'royal' grave slabs as 9 feet in length and St Margaret's tomb as partially obscured by rubble 3-4 feet deep and a stone coffin exposed by grave digging<sup>18</sup>.

**19<sup>th</sup> Century: End of Satur Churchyard, creation of new parish church, discovery of Bruce's remains, evidence uncovered for other elite medieval burials**

- 1800 William Hunt of Logie and John Stenhouse of North Fod granted lairs to the north and south of 'Phyn's burial ground'<sup>19</sup>.
- 1802 Charles Halket permitted to enclose the Pitfirrane family ground.

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the said charge, if they shall choose to bury in it... Session agreed to set the ground aside on payment of £5 for the use of the poor.

<sup>16</sup> Remains were thought to be Queen Elizabeth de Burgh, Robert I's wife, (d.1327).

<sup>17</sup> Grave slab identified for Burns by Charlie Shorthouse, gravedigger. In reality this is likely one of the 6 slabs thought to denote a group of royal burials since Bruce's tomb was not discovered until 1818.

<sup>18</sup> Old Statistical Account of Scotland, Dalzell ADD details.

<sup>19</sup> Noted in Kirk Session minutes; probably the Phin family of Limekilns. John Stenhouse paid 4 guineas for a plot six feet by nine feet and William Hunt 6 guineas for a piece nine feet square.



- 1805 7<sup>th</sup> Lord Elgin permitted to extend his burial ground to 50 feet (E-W) by 19 feet (N-S) on condition he relinquished another plot within the Satur Churchyard<sup>20</sup>.  
William son, of the 7<sup>th</sup> Earl, buried above 6<sup>th</sup> Lord Elgin<sup>21</sup>.
- 1807 Heritors and Town Council discuss the state of the building and necessary repairs. The collapse of the south west tower prevents William Stark, architect, from implementing a programme of repairs.  
Sir John Graham Dalzell, advocate and antiquary, lifts the largest of the six 'royal' grave slabs revealing a stone coffin<sup>22</sup>.  
A broadly contemporary source reported the remains of Queen Margaret's monument as visible<sup>23</sup>.
- 1807 – 1815 Satur Churchyard partially cleared of graves and rubble and levelled in preparation of new church<sup>24</sup> building work disturbed medieval burials and discovered several stone coffins<sup>25</sup>. Selected burial plots reallocated<sup>26</sup>.  
The Earl of Elgin permitted to build a family vault under the south transept of the new church<sup>27</sup> (see Figure X).  
Dunfermline Presbytery supported by the Ministers, majority of heritors and Kirk Session petitioned the Westminster Office of the King's Remembrancer and the Barons of Exchequer of Scotland for

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<sup>20</sup> The rights of the Halkets of Pitfirrane may well have extended back to the Reformation and of the Bruces of Broomhall possibly to the mid-seventeenth century. Lord Elgin was allowed his extension in 1802 on condition that he gave up an area at the east end of the church called Randiford's aisle, which had presumably formerly belonged to the family of Mentieth of Randiford, owners of Hill House.

<sup>21</sup> Nagel, Susan (1954), 121 notes 5<sup>th</sup> Earl's coffin for some reason had been removed, so a replacement was ordered. Originally the 6<sup>th</sup> Earl of Elgin had much grander burial scheme in mind for his son but time and financial constraints proved too challenging to execute.

<sup>22</sup> Dalzell.

<sup>23</sup> Fernie (1815) notes: "The particular spot, which is pointed out as the burying place of the kings, is covered with six large flat stones: The largest of these was raised, and the ground below examined in July, 1807; but nothing remarkable (except a stone coffin) was discovered. The smallest of these stones is above seven feet long; all of them above three feet broad, and between six and seven inches thick: The one which was lifted, is 'nine feet, six inches long, and five feet, two inches broad. At the east end of this churchyard, and at some considerable distance from the large flat stones, stands what is said to be the tomb of St. Margaret. The monument does not now indicate anything magnificent".

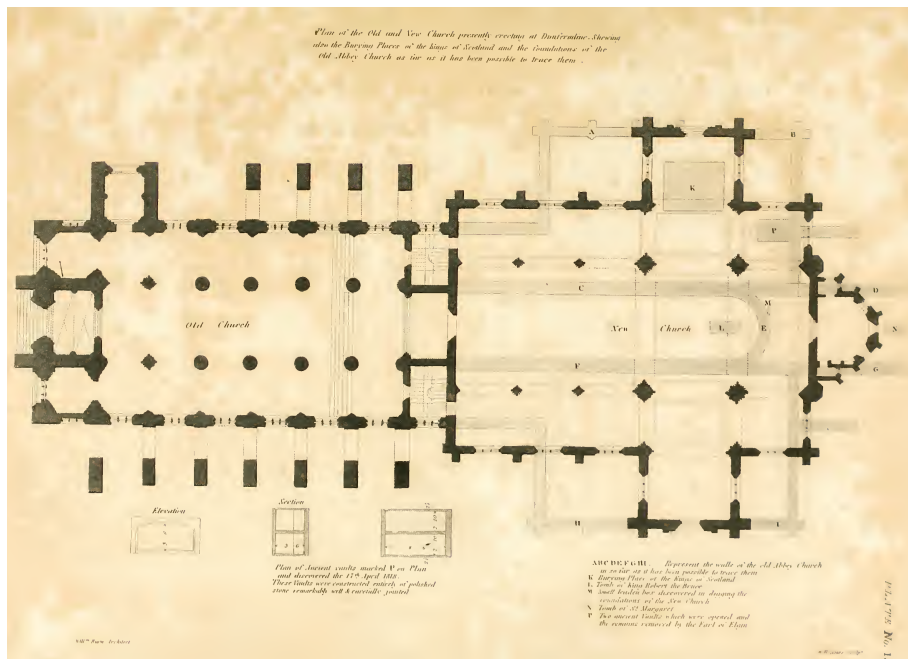
<sup>24</sup> At this time the location of the new church had not been determined; proposals included the Frater Hall area.

<sup>25</sup> Work threw up a great number of very decayed bones . . . every day . . . which must have belonged to a very ancient date'. Several stone coffins were also discovered, of the usual size; which had uniformly a round receptacle for fitting the head: some of these were formed of one stone. Mercer REF

<sup>26</sup> The new grave plots lay within an area roughly 40 feet square in the northeast corner of the Satur churchyard visible today immediately to the north of St Margaret's shrine **Query** that the reallocated lairs are within the Satur churchyard as this exceeds the extent of the Abbey Church footprint. Heritors who had not been assigned the new plots but still possessing rights of burial in the Satur Churchyard were allowed to bury under certain conditions in the aisles of the old Parish church. The conditions were securing the permission of the Kirk Session and three Heritors, one of which was to be the Provost. The graves were to be covered with flagstones on a level with the floor without railings of any kind of raised enclosure. Any commemorative tablets or monuments were to be placed on the walls of the church.

<sup>27</sup> The Elgin family vault lies beneath the old choir space that early antiquarians had identified as the location of the 6 'royal' grave slabs. Earl opened two ancient vaults marked on Report plan P.

- permission to bury any royal remains found during building work next to Queen Margaret's tomb.
- 1816 The Heritors decided a new church should be built and Kirk Session minutes record that Robert Russell was granted 6 grave spaces (or 'rooms') within the Satur Churchyard.
- 1817 Robert Burn commissioned by 7th Earl of Elgin to develop a design for a new parish church.
- 1818 Building the new (present) parish church commences over the Satur Churchyard<sup>28</sup>.  
Feb 17, Burn's workmen discover a vault sealed with two large stone slabs containing an inner vault with a lead-wrapped skeleton, oak coffin fragments and scraps of linen with gold thread, Believed to be the remains of Robert I, the Barons of the Exchequer are informed and ordered the vault to be secured and guarded. Investigations are to wait until the walls of the new church are at least seven feet high.  
More carved alabaster fragments found near Bruce's tomb<sup>29</sup>.  
Excavations for the Elgin vault in the south transept disturb an elite female grave (see also 1771) and the remains are re-interred in the new vault.



Extracted from *Report to the Right Hon. the Lord Chief Baron, and the Hon. the Barons of His Majesty's Court of Exchequer Scotland by the Kings Remembrancer Relative to the Tomb of King Robert the Bruce and the Cathedral Church of Dunfermline, 1821*

**Figure 5 Plan showing the position of Bruce's tomb, 'burying place of the Kings of Scotland' and two vaults opened by Lord Elgin**

<sup>28</sup> The creation of the new parish church resulted in most of the Satur Kirkyard being built over (i.e the area of the Abbey Church's choir and transepts). Documents indicate at this point the choir's northern wall was still standing upon a double vault near the former site of the High Altar.

<sup>29</sup> Mercer (1819).

- 1819 5 November examination of Bruce's remains<sup>30</sup>, includes a cast of the skull made by William Scoular. The public permitted to view the remains. The remains then placed in a coffin, which is then filled with melted pitch, its lid soldered on before being returned to the vault, which was resealed. During the investigation and 'lying in state', several relicts (bones fabric etc.) stolen as souvenirs<sup>31</sup>.  
10 November a copper coffin plate inscribed 'Robertus Scotorum Rex' discovered as church building progresses.  
Excavations by the south transept and in north west corner of Mr Mathieson's garden<sup>32</sup> discover several carved hands possibly from funerary effigies<sup>33</sup>.

Figure 6 Annotated OS Town Plan 1845 showing labelled points of interest within church footprint

**New parish church opens, transfer of Old Nave to State Care, hoax coffin plate, more medieval remains uncovered, Robert Bruce eventually commemorated**

- 1821 New Abbey Church of Dunfermline officially opens on St Andrew's Day.  
Plans to restore the former nave dropped.  
Publication of *The report to Hon. The Barons of His Majesty's Court Of Exchequer Scotland by the Kings Remembrancer Relative to the Tomb of King Robert the Bruce and the Cathedral Church of Dunfermline*.  
Sir Henry Jardine, *the Kings Remembrancer*, recommends suitable memorial ought to mark Bruce's grave, Dr Gregory composes of an epitaph in Latin, proposal not acted upon.
- 1823 Wood map shows the near church surrounded on both sides by churchyards.
- 1840s The nave and sanctuary entrusted into state care. A programme of repair ensues.
- 1845 Glasgow Herald claims that 'every pilgrim who visits the shrine' feels and laments the want of a memorial' to Bruce.
- 1849 Two stone coffins, one with part of a leathern shroud, found when repairing the east end of the old nave. Remains believed to be Princes Edward and Ethelrede, sons of Malcolm and Margaret.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Those present included the magistrates of the burgh, heritors of the church, local gentry, two of the lords of treasury, Dr Gregory, His Majesty's Physician for Scotland, Dr Monro, Professor of Anatomy at Edinburgh University, and a large crowd of local townspeople.

<sup>31</sup> Penman (2009) 35

<sup>32</sup> Query – where is this?

<sup>33</sup> Excavation in NW corner of Mr Mathieson's garden discovers a built-up doorway. Exploration revealed possible remains of the Monastic Lavatorium. Discovery of two finely carved hands, both with rings on 3rd finger. Part of an armoured arm also found, cited in Ordnance Survey Object Name Book.

<sup>34</sup> The find spot was marked by a gravestone on the Abbey Church floor to Johannes Scott who died in 1508, which was the oldest legible inscription. Rev Chalmers PSAS, Volume 2 (1855-56), pp 75-7; Henderson (1856)

- 1854 Ordnance Survey large scale Scottish town plan map - Sheet 4 - denotes the location in the Abbey Church of graves / monuments to Schaw, Gillespie, Commendator Pitcairn, Pitfirrane and at the new parish church of Bruce's grave, St Margaret's tomb and Elgin's vault (figure x).
- 1855 Excavation discovers side-wall of S transept 5 feet below surface.<sup>35</sup>  
See also 1819
- 1877 Coffin plate revealed as a hoax involving the architect William Burn's younger brother.
- 1889 7<sup>th</sup> Earl of Elgin gifts a brass effigy brass inlaid in porphyry to mark Bruce's grave.
- 1891 Pulpit moved to install Bruce's monument.  
Margaret's tomb restored and enclosed by command of Queen Victoria.<sup>36</sup>
- 1894 OS map - XXXVIII.8.10 notes the location of St Margaret's tomb, Elgin and Pitreavie vaults
- 1905 Wardlaw vault reduced by one bay<sup>37</sup>.
- 1916 Foundations of the earlier church (see 1050) located by Peter Macgregor Chalmers, architect, when investigating of the interior of the Old Nave.  
Designation (listing and scheduling) of abbey buildings.

### Modern investigation

- 2014 Ground penetrating radar (GPR) survey<sup>38</sup> of part of the north transept and the vestry establishes the means to locate graves below the current church floor. Within the 4 areas surveyed, the greatest density of graves lay below the vestry to the west of St Margaret's shrine.

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<sup>35</sup> Excavations carried out to determine floor plan of monastery and identify any surviving vaults. Ashlar masonry wall excavated 22 feet to find of an arched doorway leading to Mr Mathieson's garden .Cited in Ordnance Survey Object Name Book which also references work carried out in 1818 and in 18<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>36</sup> Chisholm, Hugh (ed) 1911. "Dunfermline" in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 8 (11<sup>th</sup> ed.). Cambridge University Press

<sup>37</sup> Reduction was to reveal the processional doorway in the second bay from the east of the south nave aisle which had been rediscovered two years earlier.

<sup>38</sup> Carrick E, 2016, Ground Penetrating Radar Survey of Part of the North Transept and the Vestry of Dunfermline Abbey, unpublished report by EMC Radar Consulting and OJC Heritage for Dr Michael Penman, Stirling University

### 3.0 Dunfermline Abbey Old Churchyard

#### 3.1 Timeline

##### Medieval use

- 1150 Completion of the abbey cloisters means the northern graveyard, later known as the Old Churchyard, is the only ground available for the town's burials.
- 13<sup>th</sup> century Archaeological evidence shows at this time town burials included the ground currently the Abbot 's House garden.<sup>39</sup>

##### Figure 7 Plan of 1992 excavation at the Abbot's House

- 1303 Tradition asserts Lady Margaret de Lambinus Craufuird, mother of Sir William Wallace, was buried in the old churchyard. A thorn-tree was planted on her grave (see figure x and 1560 for an alternative tradition for this tree).
- Early 15<sup>th</sup> century Burials within the Abbot House garden area cease. A lack of evidence for burials beneath the house footprint suggests a boundary existed between the churchyard area<sup>40</sup> and the Abbey Precinct Wall.
- 1444-68 Abbot Richard de Bothwell rebuilds the north west part of the nave, adds a north west tower and north porch. The Abbot's House, to the north of the churchyard, also built around this period.

##### Figure 8 Conjectural northern perimeter of the old churchyard in relation to the Maygate , Abbey precinct and Abbot's House

##### Post-Reformation

##### 17<sup>th</sup> Century: Drainage problems, regulation of monuments

- 1560 Tradition holds a pre-Reformation churchyard weeping cross was destroyed and a hawthorn tree planted to mark its location (see 1303 for an alternative tradition).
- 1608-9 Two men were paid for taking up, cleaning and replacing an existing churchyard drain<sup>41</sup>.

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<sup>39</sup> Archaeological excavation found a total of eight graves, containing nine bodies of mixed ages and sexes. All eight graves were widely spaced with none intersecting, interpreted as evidence for a short period of use. Finds of medieval pottery and disarticulated human bone in the garden soil levels indicates further medieval burials may exist in the adjacent areas of the churchyard. Additionally, below the burials were a series of 12<sup>th</sup> century workshops. Industrial activity was deliberately covered with a layer of rubble, clay and garden soils in the 13<sup>th</sup> century to enable the area to be reused for burials. Coleman R, 1996, 'Excavations at the Abbot's House, Maygate, Dunfermline', *Tayside and Fife Archaeological Journal* Volume 2.

<sup>40</sup> The burials may be contemporary with a cobbled path inside the Precinct Wall and a courtyard found beneath the Abbot's House. These features similarly fell out of use in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, with the area probably abandoned for a period prior to the construction of the first phase of the Abbot's House. Coleman R, 1996, 'Excavations at the Abbot's House, Maygate, Dunfermline', *Tayside and Fife Archaeological Journal* Volume 2.

<sup>41</sup> Noted in Kirk Session records.

- 1620-25 Rows of flying buttresses added along the north and south wall of the Abbey Church Nave.
- 1625 Earliest dated gravestone that survives today.<sup>42</sup>
- 1640 Kirk Session remains concerned about waterlogging<sup>43</sup>
- 1641 Kirk Session prohibits erection of through-stones without their permission.  
Kirk Session instruct the beadle, to tackle waterlogging, with a collection to raise funds for drainage works, and the bellman to stop local weavers from washing their webs in the flooded ground.<sup>44</sup>
- 1643 Boundaries permitted by Kirk Session around 5 family burial plots beside the buttresses near the church door to stop people going to the toilet there.<sup>45</sup>
- 1648 Boundaries permitted around additional burial plots.<sup>46</sup>
- 1649 A further attempt to install drain, again on instruction of Kirk Session apparently without success.
- 1653 James Anderson Snr requests a new burial place because his current plot is full of water<sup>47</sup>.
- 1654 Kirk Session note payment for through-stones was levied on basis of a past act and charges now apply for headstones (6/8d). Non-payers to be identified by searching Session records and inspecting the churchyard.
- 1660 Renewed attempts to end flooding results in a new drainage scheme funded by a voluntary contributions, which included

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<sup>42</sup> Documentary evidences indicates this was not the earliest gravestone erected, buried gravestone survey located undated stones of possibly earlier in date.

<sup>43</sup> Attempts to improve drainage noted in Kirk Session records.

<sup>44</sup> Although a drain was planned this doesn't seem to have been built. A mason is placed in charge of building the drain and stone is sought from the quarry of Alexander Chalmers of Pittencreiff. ADD ref

<sup>45</sup> Ratification of 1641 Kirk Session minute which granted permission to George Turnbull, James Reid, Thomas Stanhouse, Robert Mudie and James Stanhouse 'to build revells about their burial places for keeping of them clean from those who would defile them with excrements, with provision that the buttresses and kirk walls be not hokit (howked?) nor stirred. The said James Reid having a burial place for himself next to the porch door on the east side thereof, and the said George Turnbull in Broomhall having his room of burial for himself and his next adjacent thereto enclosed with revells, and next to him the said Thomas Stanhouse and Robert Mudie, having their rooms of burial equally between them enclosed with revells. And hereby grants the said James Stanhouse to have one only room with them for a grave therein on the arch side next to the entry door of the said burial.

<sup>46</sup> Permission granted to James Leslie of Pitliver and James Wardlaw of Wester Luscar to put up a revel of timber around their burial place bounded at the east side of the northeast door of the kirk.

<sup>47</sup> Kirk Session minutes records the request for a lair on the north side of Tobias Muirbeck by James Anderson Snr for himself and Andrew Anderson surgeon. James Hutton and Thomas Stanhouse to inspect and report.



- diverting water below the Minister's house <sup>48</sup>. The culvert found during an 1992 excavation is thought to be part of this scheme<sup>49</sup>.
- 1672 Part of the choir is blown down potentially damaging graves (see 1753).
- 1685 John Astie of Aberdour sells to John Burn, mealmaker, his burial plot and gravestones.<sup>50</sup>

**18<sup>th</sup> Century: Drainage continues to be an issue, north wall built and north strip of churchyard sold, eastern portion of graveyard little-used, tightening of burial management, no upright monuments allowed.**

- 1726 The east gable crumbles.
- 1735 North churchyard wall built after the Town Council and Kirk Session discuss the churchyard's condition and agree a series of improvements, including a new stone wall. Kirk Session sells a parcel of churchyard land the one of householders for a back yard.<sup>51</sup>  
A further drain built to combat waterlogging.
- 1737 Parcels of churchyard ground sold to householders on the south side of the Maygate <sup>52</sup>
- 1748 Kirk Session rule that a grave is not to be sold on<sup>53</sup>.
- 1749 Kirk Session rule before a plot can be purchased they must confirm with the gravedigger that it doesn't already belong to someone else.<sup>54</sup>
- 1750s Dunfermline's population approx. 3,000 adults.  
At this time eastern portion of churchyard described as 'little-used'<sup>55</sup>.

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<sup>48</sup> Kirk Session minutes note most of the kirkyard has been useless for many years past and it needs to be dried so that it can be used for burials. 'Skilful men' have been consulted, who think that it would be made dry if there was a gutter made under the graves 'and an open cast for conveying the water away under the Minister's house. Mr William Oliphant, requests that if his house is damaged by running water from the kirkyard into his gutter it will be repaired at the session's expense, and that the session should pay half the expenses of keeping the gutter in repair.

<sup>49</sup> Coleman R, 1996, 'Excavations at the Abbot's House, Maygate, Dunfermline', *Tayside and Fife Archaeological Journal* Volume 2.

<sup>50</sup> Kirk Session minutes give details of the location 'on the west side of the way as they enter into the kirk' and monument types 'through and headstones.

<sup>51</sup> Kirk Session minutes note 'A stone and lyme dyke six foot high was to be built running from ye south pillar of ye west kirk style next Baillie Rolland's house east through the north side of the kirkyard to be a fence to and a boundary thereof in time coming'. Each tenements proprietor on the north boundary was to pay towards the wall and keep the Kirkyard free of all 'middings and nastiness whatsoever'. Kirk Session sells a tenement owner (i.e. householder on the south side of the Maygate) 'a small yard behind his house'.

<sup>52</sup> Kirk Session records note the Heritors and Session agreed 'to dispone to each proprietor on the south side of the Maygate a part of the churchyard opposite their respective tenements in order to the better fencing of the churchyard on that side.'

<sup>53</sup> First notice in the Kirk Session Minutes that graves are not to be resold, but regulation may have occurred earlier.

<sup>54</sup> At this time Kirk Session minutes regularly note that before any application to purchase a burial plot was granted the gravedigger must be consulted by the Session to establish whether 'vacant' or if burial rights exists (i.e. not known to belong to any particular person rather than no burials there). **Query** what is exact phrasing?

<sup>55</sup> Noted in Kirk Session minutes. (**Query** corresponds to burial records?) The terms to clear the stone rubble from the tower collapse in 17523 included using rubbish to fill up the hollows at the east end of the

- 1753 Burials disturbed by collapse of tower at northeast end of the parish church<sup>56</sup>.
- 1755 Kirk Session ratifies fees for beadle, bell ringer and gravedigger.
- 1760-1800 277 burials<sup>57</sup> (average of just under 7 per annum).
- 1762 Kirk Session prohibit headstones and order any existing large headstones and through-stones impeding transportation of coffins to be laid flat<sup>58</sup>.
- 1763 The Heritors and Session prohibit any future digging up of the path from the north churchyard gate to the west church door for burials<sup>59</sup>.
- 1764 The Kirk Session now permits headstones but only beside the east wall of the churchyard<sup>60</sup>.
- 1769 Kirk Session further limited gravestone designs by disallowing in the future headstones larger than 2ft. wide and 2½ ft long to be laid flat on lairs.
- 1771 Kirk Session agrees to set a burial place on eastern part of the Conventual Church for Rev. Mr. Thomson, Minister, and succeeding ministers.<sup>61</sup>
- 1776 Kirk Session grants burial space to James Miller, which was only to be sold if moved way from the parish or on extinction.<sup>62</sup>
- 1784 Thorn tree blown down in a storm down and a cutting from the old tree was planted in its place.

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churchyard, 'where there were as yet no burials'. **Query** Sue Mowat notes other evidence suggests was the wettest area of the boggy churchyard and was not used until there was absolutely no other space – is there additional evidence to 2015 buried stone report?

<sup>56</sup> A turnpike tower adjoining the northeast end of the parish church collapsed in 1753 and the transept crumbles disturbing and 'throwing up' many of the recent burials in the graveyard indicating their relatively shallow nature. Terms to clear the stone rubble included using rubbish to fill up the hollows at the east end of the churchyard, where there were as yet no burials ADD Sue Mowat REF.

<sup>57</sup> ADD historical source REF. Note that these and subsequent burial figures do not state which areas of the Dunfermline Abbey site they apply too.

<sup>58</sup> The Kirk Session resolved that 'To prevent the happening of great difficulties of carrying corpses through the church yard to burying places, for the future no new headstones would be allowed to set up to stand on their Ends or Edges but to be laid flat on the Ground. Also any Trough Stones, High Headstones already standing if inconvenient were to be removed or laid flat on the ground'.

<sup>59</sup> Kirk Session minutes note 'John Christy, dec[ eased ], late Miller in Lady's Miln, had a burying place there [along the course of the path] which can be of no use without breaking it up and it is reasonable to grant to his heirs a burying place of two grave rooms west and a little south of the thorn'. This was at no cost but the heirs would not to able sell the ground.

<sup>60</sup> Kirk Session minutes show the Session considered that erect headstones along the East Wall of the Churchyard at a distance of one graveslength from the wall would be of no public detriment, resolved to grant the Liberty of setting up headstones to persons having or purchasing Burying Places who demand and pay for the Liberty.

<sup>61</sup> Rev. Mr. Thomson, Minister, as reported for the Satur Churchyard 1771 , on the death of his late wife, he took possession of a burying place of about seven grave breadths on what was formerly the Eastern part of the Church, now commonly called the Psalter Churchyard, and expressed his desire that the Session would set apart and appoint the said ground to be a burying place for him, and his successors in office of Minister of the said charge, if they shall choose to bury in it. The Session agreed to set the ground aside on payment of £5 for the use of the poor.

<sup>62</sup> Kirk Session notes that James Miller, mason in Golfdrum wanted two grave rooms on the south side of the Thorn tree. This was granted on payment of 2s. to the poor and was only to be sold [presumably by Kirk Session] if he removed from the parish or on extinction [presumably of any on-going family use].

1787 A fragment of a 13<sup>th</sup> century floriated cross reused and erected as a gravestone.

**19<sup>th</sup> century: Epidemics, lair plan created, landscape improvements prove short-lived, moves to officially close the churchyard**

1819 A numbered list of grave plot owners drawn up, most likely for the Kirk Session as part of the preparations for building a new parish church.

1823 Wood's map shows an eastern boundary the churchyard but this was never actually built.<sup>63</sup>

**Figure 9 Extract of Plan of the Town of Dunfermline from actual survey by John Wood, published 1823, showing layout of the Old Churchyard**

1825 Association for Protecting the Graveyard established after grave robbing scare in order to patrol the churchyard.

1836 311 burials in the churchyard.<sup>64</sup>

1837 Epidemics result in 493 burials in the churchyard<sup>65</sup>.

1840 A further churchyard drain is needed along the east boundary wall.<sup>66</sup>

1843-44 A new iron gate is installed at the north west entrance.<sup>67</sup>  
The churchyard's appearance is praised in print by a visitor from Ayr<sup>68</sup>.

1845 Churchyard's appearance is celebrated in the local press, having been levelled, raised and properly divided.<sup>69</sup>.

1854 Kirk Session commission John Anderson, an Edinburgh-based surveyor to draw up a lair plan of the Old Churchyard.  
OS map - sheet 4 shows 'The site of the Ancient Abbey Cross supposed site of Wallace's Mother's Grave' – represented by a

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<sup>63</sup> Sue Mowat's paper on the New Churchyard describes how the Heritors had agreed to sell the eastern part of the new land acquired for the New Churchyard to Town Clerk David Black but he died before business could be concluded, meaning the Heritors retained ownership of this part of the churchyard.

<sup>64</sup> Figure given in *The weavers' craft; being a history of the Weavers' incorporation of Dunfermline, with word pictures of the passing times* by Thomson, Daniel 1903 p331. It is not clear if these burials took place only in the New Churchyard or within the Old Churchyard also.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.* Epidemics included influenza, typhus fever and measles.

<sup>66</sup> The drain was to be laid along east side of line of east boundary wall of old churchyard south to Mr Hunt's millpond / lade to assist with drying out the churchyard.

<sup>67</sup> The old gateway at the north west entrance to the Old Churchyard was replaced by an iron one, (in a similar design to the eastern gate), and a wicket gate for pedestrians added as a side entry, the main gates only being opened to admit funeral hearses.

<sup>68</sup> The Scottish Journal of Topography, Antiquities, Traditions, No. 48, published 29 July 1848. 'A visit to Dunfermline Abbey' p1. In common with most articles celebrating the churchyard's appearance, the author doesn't particularly distinguish between the Old and the New Churchyards. Pictorial evidence when taken with visitors' accounts appear to indicate a higher level of landscaping existed within the New Churchyard than the Old but that the latter's grounds were sufficiently improved not to detract from the landscape quality of the Abbey site as a whole.

<sup>69</sup> *Fifeshire Journal* 04 09 1845 p2 describes how 'formerly the burying-ground was the most unsightly we ever beheld – irregular and damp'.

cross on tree; Ralph Erskine's grave; remains of Lady Chapel and St Margaret's Tomb.

Figure 10 Annotated OS Town Plan 1854 showing labelled points of interest

- 1854 The churchyard's appearance continues to be highly praised.<sup>70</sup>
- 1855 Burial Act (Scotland) passed.
- 1856 The lair plan of the Old Churchyard completed, showing space for 1,200 burials<sup>71</sup>.

Figure 11 1855 Lair plan of the Old Churchyard

- 1859 Heritors meeting sought to clarify any outstanding fees and their own and the Kirk Session's rights in relation to the Old Churchyard.<sup>72</sup>  
Parochial Board established to take forward opening a new cemetery.
- 1860 Letter in the press complains about the condition and appearance of the Old Burial Ground, seeking clarification for 'what the annual fee covers if not landscape maintenance?'<sup>73</sup>
- 1860s Numerous press reports describe burial overcrowding and the threats to public health and decency.<sup>74</sup>
- 1861 Press reports criticise the poor appearance of the churchyard, contrasting it to when William Allen was Churchyard Superintendent (1832-1854).
- 1862 Heritors resolve to take future action to prevent people from using the Old Churchyard as a shortcut via the north and east gates<sup>75</sup>.
- 1863 Halbeath Road Cemetery opens.  
Reports of public damaging graveyard planting.<sup>76</sup>  
Heritors meet to discuss Parochial Board's move to close the Abbey churchyards to new burials and agreed on the condition that the Board takes over the maintenance costs<sup>77</sup>.

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<sup>70</sup> E.g. Chalmers History of Dunfermline pub 1854 vol i p 498 (Appendix)

<sup>71</sup> Sue Mowat, local historian and co-ordinator of graveyard recording 2005-07 believes this lair plan is likely to be reasonably accurate, taking into account that, like the 1819 list, it would have been made with the assistance of the memories of the beadle and gravediggers.

<sup>72</sup> When rights to a lair lapsed in the Old Churchyard and it was resold or renewed the funds were taken by the Kirk Session but should in fact belong to the Heritors. It was agreed to investigate the extent of past sales.

<sup>73</sup> ADD REF

<sup>74</sup> See New Churchyard timeline for further details.

<sup>75</sup> This was acted upon in 1867 with the installation of a fence around the lairs at the north east end of the church and two sets of iron gates.

<sup>76</sup> Reports of adults and children alike causing damage – similar complaints made again in 1865. ADD all REFS, i.e. newspapers, Heritors Minutes, secondary sources.

- 1864 Parochial board refuse to pay the superintendent's salary<sup>78</sup>.
- 1869 Heritors voice concern about the churchyard's condition and charge the superintendent with ensuring grave owners make good their lairs.<sup>79</sup>
- 1870s Heritors continue to be concerned that churchyard is not being sufficiently well-managed. Undesirable visitors 'loungers and idlers' are also a major management concern.<sup>80</sup>
- 1889 Dunfermline Sanitary Committee commission a report on the Old Churchyard's condition: this finds the it should be closed on public health grounds<sup>81</sup> but the Heritors again refuse to close the site where existing burial rights exist.
- 1894 OS map - XXXVIII.8.10 notes the location of Erskine's graves and gated north and east entrances.

Figure 12 Annotated OS Town Plan 1894 showing labelled points of interest

- 1895 Dunfermline Sanitary Committee commission a second report on the Old Churchyard's condition, which again concludes that the Old Churchyard should be immediately closed on public health grounds<sup>82</sup>.  
The Committee applied to the Sheriff to have the churchyard closed in accordance with the Public Health Act 1865.
- 1896 Sheriff orders the closure of the Old Churchyard, which is upheld after appeal<sup>83</sup>.

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<sup>77</sup> Closure was likely to mean purchasing new burial plots; existing close family would still be able to be buried with the lair holder. The Heritors were responsible for the Old Churchyard's upkeep costs, including the superintendent's salary.

<sup>78</sup> The Parochial Board notes that they can simply apply for Order in Council to close the burial ground.

<sup>79</sup> Heritors meeting notes 'the unseemly state of some parts of the churchyard in consequence of the dilapidation of the tombstones and subsidence of the ground'. They agree that the superintendent should see that grave owners repair their stones and level their ground.

<sup>80</sup> Specific concerns included overgrown grass, path borders not properly trimmed. Heritors view the superintendent as negligent. Heritors cited the importance of good maintenance since the Abbey grounds are frequented by visitors to town as well as by local inhabitants. Heritors ordered the superintendent to get the grounds put in a proper state immediately and to ensure that either he or his assistant are present at all times the churchyard is open. See New Churchyard timeline for further details.

<sup>81</sup> The report states that one reason why the new cemetery was needed in 1863 was that the Old Churchyard was simply 'so saturated with animal matter' it was unfit for further burials but since then approx. 3350 burials in the Old Churchyard. They considered the site must now be closed as 'the emanations from it must be very injurious to those living in the vicinity and more or less so to the community in general'.

<sup>82</sup> The report was written by Sir Henry Littlejohn, Medical Officer of Health for the City of Edinburgh. In it Littlejohn notes he counted 673 flat gravestones and 181 upright, giving a total of 854 in the Old Churchyard, of which upwards of 30 have been recently erected. He further noted that the Sanitary Inspector counted an average of 50 plus interments per annum over the last ten years. Although this area didn't have any common ground, transferral of rights to interment were exercised on a free and easy basis to parties having no real claims to such privilege. Pit digging found 'the state of the soil down to a depth of five feet was most objectionable. At 2½ feet water began to collect and through this foul liquid, gas escaped in considerable quantity of a most offensive character. By the North door of the Abbey coffins were found within 3 feet (21/2) of the surface. At other points the soil ½ a foot below the surface was full of organic matter emitting a strong odour and of a greasy appearance.

<sup>83</sup> As Sue Mowat notes in 'The New Churchyard' that continual waterlogging was one of the reasons for the closure.

Replacement thorn tree blown down in a storm, with the current tree planted in its place.

**20<sup>th</sup> Century Churchyard transferred from Heritors to Parochial Board**

- 1925 Church of Scotland Property and Endowments Act automatically transfers responsibility for the Abbey Churchyards from the Heritors to the Parish Council.
- 1926/7 Parish Council take over the running of the churchyards from the Heritors and Kirk Session. The Council level and tidy up the landscape, re-erecting gravestones.<sup>84</sup> The trees along path to the porch likely date from this time.

**Modern Investigation**

- 1972 Memorial inscription surveys carried out by JF Mitchell published by the Scottish Genealogy Society,<sup>85</sup>
- 1992 Tayside and Fife Archaeological Unit excavated the Abbot's House, at the northern end of the graveyard – see note about difference between Abbey precinct wall and N & E Kirkyard wall
- 1993 Memorial Inscription survey carried out by Shelia Pitcairn published by the Scottish Genealogy Society.
- 2013-16 Buried Tombstone excavation and recording co-ordinated by Sue Mowat DCHP.

[Figure 13 Location of buried gravestone recording 2013 – 2016 DCHP website](#)

[Figure 14 Graveyard survey areas](#)

- 2015 Young Archaeologists Club make plans of the graveyard<sup>86</sup>.
- 2017-19 Buried gravestone excavation and recording co-ordinated by Mark Seaborne, Young Archaeology Club director and professional archaeologist.

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<sup>84</sup> As Sue Mowat notes in 'The New Churchyard', by this date this graveyard been out of use for more than thirty years, so there was no longer any need to provide access for coffin-bearers.

<sup>85</sup> Abbreviated transcription of stones.

<sup>86</sup> Query confirm extent of coverage



## 4.0 The New Churchyard

### 4.1 Timeline

#### Medieval beginnings

- 1150-1560 Monks' burial ground<sup>87</sup> was located south of the Abbey Church around the centre plot of the New Churchyard and may survive below its footprint<sup>88</sup>.
- 1560 After the Reformation, several monks were allocated small parcels of land within the Abbey precinct. These may survive below the New Churchyard's footprint.
- 1584 James VI reallocates several of the monks' property, after their deaths, to his servants.

Figure 15 Conjectural sketch plan of Dunfermline Abbey 1400-1550

#### 19<sup>th</sup> century

#### Need for new burial provision, epidemics and body snatching, well laid out site attracts praise under William Allen as Supervisor

- 1807 Heritors note Old Churchyard nearly full and a committee is created to secure ground for additional burial provision.<sup>89</sup>
- 1823 The New Churchyard laid out on the south and east sides of the Abbey Church after the Heritors purchased the land.<sup>90</sup>  
A plan of the grave plots is drawn up and the sale of lairs commences.  
Heritors introduced the rule that no monument should be higher than 12 inches.
- 1825 Grave robbing scare prompts creation of an Association for Protecting the Graveyard to regularly patrol the ground<sup>91</sup>.
- 1832 158 cholera victims buried in the West Plot<sup>92</sup>(see figure x).  
Heritors appoint William Allan as superintendent of the churchyard.
- 1837 Heritors take steps taken to improve east entrance by purchasing additional ground and building a temporary gate.
- 1840 Heritors sell a strip of land on the south side of the eastern entrance.

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<sup>87</sup> The monks' burial ground is believed to lie within the centre plot of the New Churchyard, behind where the dormitory building were located, which is the traditional location. 12 stone coffins were found in this general area 19<sup>th</sup> century when the walk on the west side of the plot was dug up to make a drain.

<sup>88</sup> Originally, monastic buildings (including cloisters, chapter-house and dormitories) covered the entire area of the modern churchyard lying between the church and the southern wall of the refectory.

<sup>89</sup> At this point in time the Heritors decided to build a new church but not agreed its location.

<sup>90</sup> The land was privately owned and was previously known as the Bowling and / or Frater Green, part of the lands of the Regality of Dunfermline whose superior was the Earl of Tweeddale. The Earl claimed feu duty for the churchyard from the Heritors until the Parish Council took responsibility for the churchyard in 1925.

<sup>91</sup> This ceases around 1832 after the Anatomy Act creates a legitimate source of bodies for medical schools.

<sup>92</sup> At the height of the epidemic there were between 15 and 24 funerals in a day. Sue Mowat, 'The Old Churchyard', notes that this ground was also set aside for pauper, (also known as parish or common), burials.

- 1843 A visitor, from Ayr, effusively commends the churchyard's appearance, as decidedly superior of any he's seen.<sup>93</sup>
- 1843-44 New iron gate with stone piers erected at the east entrance. The southern wall of the churchyard was repaired and heightened, and access agreed with local householders.<sup>94</sup>
- 1845 Appearance of the churchyards celebrated in the local press, noting it is adorned with shrubs, flowers and walks and that 'in every way accords with the hoary ruins which surrounds it'. The site has been transformed into one of the most elegant and commodious burying grounds<sup>95</sup>.
- 1849 Centre plot opened for pauper burials (see figure x).
- 1850 Fraternity cleared by unemployed weavers<sup>96</sup>. The churchyard superintendant was instructed to prevent rubbish to be deposited around the Fraternity in the future.  
William Allan appointed as Keeper of the Abbey Church and adjoining Ruins and Grounds by the Commissioner of Woods and Forests.
- 1854 The churchyard's appearance is highly praised for the planting and as a setting for the Abbey ruins after a programme of improvements.<sup>97</sup>  
Death of William Allan with William Wilson appointed as new superintendent of the churchyard<sup>98</sup>.  
Ordnance Survey large scale Scottish town plan map - Sheet 4 - notes the location of Pitreavie and Elgin vaults.

Figure 16 Annotated OS Town Plan 1854 showing labelled points of interest

### Churchyard landscape deteriorates

- 1855 Burial (Scotland) Act passed.  
Heritors commission a new lair plan to replace the one made in 1823, which was 'inaccurate in several particulars'.
- 1856 New plan completed.

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<sup>93</sup> The Scottish Journal of Topography, Antiquities, Traditions, No. 48, published 29 July 1848. 'A visit to Dunfermline Abbey' p1. Considers it superior to Glasgow's Necropolis due to neatness and limited scale of monumentality 'more like a garden than resting place of the dead' and highly picturesque with the nearby ruins. Management is so well executed it is hard to discern newly made from existing graves

<sup>94</sup> Funds from 1840 land sale used to install a new iron gate with stone piers erected at the east entrance. The southern wall of the churchyard was repaired and heightened in places. The Heritors also reached compromise with owners of some adjacent properties regarding gates in their garden walls giving access to the churchyard. Prior attempts to close the gates completely failed, but agreed access on payment of 2/6d (121/2 p) a year 'for the purpose of going to church or of walking in the grounds'.

<sup>95</sup> *Fifeshire Journal* 04 09 1845 p2.

<sup>96</sup> For years the Fraternity area was used by gravediggers to dump soil, bones and coffin wood.

<sup>97</sup> Chalmers History of Dunfermline pub 1854 vol i p 498 (Appendix).

<sup>98</sup> In 1855 Wilson was appointed as Dunfermline's first Registrar of Births, Marriages and Deaths in accordance with new burial act requirements. He was also the Session Clerk and official Keeper of the Abbey ruins. Possibly these multiple functions when combined with the prevalent demographic and economic conditions, wrought a detrimental affect on the quality of churchyard management.

- Family of William Purves place an upright monument on his grave, contrary to churchyard regulations.
- Heritors appoint a committee to refresh churchyard regulations: with the 11 rules reiterating the limit on monument height, burial registration (complying with the 1855 act), opening hours and use of ground in a systematic, pre-determined order<sup>99</sup>.
- 1857 A Crimea War cannon placed in Outshot area (Figure x 3) to mark the successful conclusion of warfare.
- Parochial Board established a committee to establish a new cemetery for Dunfermline.

**Figure 17 Aerial photo showing location of features (former and current)**

- 1859-63 Sales of lairs (or 'rooms') in New Ground average 20 per annum.
- 1859 Heritors complain about the new urinal (figure x 6) and drinking fountain erected in south west corner of the churchyard<sup>100</sup>.  
Centre Plot full so some paupers burials begin to take place in the Outshot (Figure x 3).
- 1860 Heritors permit the widow of Robert Douglas of Craidhu to erect a memorial on his grave (see 1823) on condition it was no more than 3 feet high (figure x 4).  
Claims that 400-500 graves are dug per annum<sup>101</sup>.

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<sup>99</sup> 1) The Superintendent is to keep the North and East gates unlocked at the following times: 1 May to 1 September from 7.00am to 8.00pm. 1 September to 1 November 8.00am to 6.00pm. 1 November to 1 March 8.00am to 4.00pm. 1 March to 1 May 8.00am to 6.00pm On Sundays throughout the year all gates are to be unlocked from 8.00am to 4.00pm. 2) The West gate may be opened for funerals and all other parochial purposes but must be locked at all other times. No person is to have a duplicate key without getting special permission from management committee of the Heritors. 3) The Superintendent or his deputy, for whom he was to be responsible, must remain within the gates during the respective hours at the various periods above mentioned, and at all times show due courtesy and civility to all persons visiting the grounds and must point out to parties the graves of their relatives or friends without asking any gratuity for doing so. 4) He is to keep the burying ground and walks in a proper state and good and tidy order and prevent all nuisances of any kind within the gates. 5) No-one is to bring dogs or smoke within the gates. The Superintendent is to 'check all unseemly conduct and dismiss loungers and idlers or any disorderly person or persons from the grounds.' 6) Sales of rooms in new burying ground are to 'be made in regular order and succession in accordance with the plan thereof and no new plot of ground shall be broken in upon until the others already commenced are exhausted'. In future grave rooms are only to be sold to parishioners and no more than three to one buyer without authorisation of the managing committee. All grave rooms are to be subject to churchyard regulations. 7) The ground set aside for the interment of the poor of the parish is to be used in regular succession and two rows or lengths of the said ground must be kept for the interment of children under 5 years of age, in order that two graves may always be put in one length. 8) The Superintendent is to keep a correct register of the names of all persons interred in new burying ground and the number of rooms according to the plan, so that he can inform relatives and friends of these points. 9) All gravestones within the gates, excepting those round the walls, are to be laid flat on the ground and where enclosures of rooms are erected none are to be allowed to stand more than ten inches above the ground and all gravestones or enclosures are to have the number of the lair engraved on them in accordance with the plan of the burying ground. 10) To avoid the frequent inconvenience of several funerals happening at the same time 'arising from the practice which at present prevails of relatives fixing the hour and issuing funeral letters before giving notice to the superintendent of the interment' parties are recommended to inform the superintendent at least 24 hours before the proposed time of interment. 11) Parishioners are to avoid having interments on Sundays after the bells for public worship have begun to ring, either for morning or afternoon service.

<sup>100</sup> These were erected by other Heritors near the Fraternity who sought its removal, if sited on Heritor-owned ground. The toilet was eventually removed whereas the drinking fountain remained for several years.

- Newspapers report various issues linked to burial overcrowding.<sup>102</sup>
- 1861 Continued press reports on the effects of burial overcrowding<sup>103</sup>. Coverage describes the site's poor appearance in contrast to when William Allan was Churchyard superintendent. Heritor's order the pile of broken coffins beside the church be moved into the new store.
- 1862 Local press reports the burning of pauper coffins is not one-off but an annual occurrence.
- 1863 Halbeath Road cemetery opens and pauper burials ceased, but the sale of lairs in the New Churchyard's eastern section remains steady at an average of about 20 per annum. Press reports that visitors, children and adults, are frequently damaging graveyard planting. Similar complaints are made again in 1865.
- 1866 After fairly steady sales, plots purchases drop to 7 per annum.
- 1867 Sale of grave plots drop again to 3 per annum, to average about 2 per annum, although some years there are no sales. Closure of the Abbey grounds for two hours every day prompts public complaints.<sup>104</sup> Visitor describes how the grounds are (too) popular with local people due to their appearance from planting and ruins.<sup>105</sup>
- 1869 Resignation of William Wilson as churchyard superintendent. Thomas Sinclair, a professional gardener, was appointed in his place.
- 1870 Heritors express concern that churchyard is not being sufficiently well-managed, ordering immediate action by the superintendent to get the grounds into a proper state and ensure that either he or his assistant are present at all times the churchyard is open.<sup>106</sup>
- 1874 Heritors continue to voice dissatisfaction over management, particularly the undesirable visitors 'loungers and idlers'. Walks relaid with engine ashes.

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<sup>101</sup> Dunfermline Saturday Press 18 May 1861.

<sup>102</sup> Newspaper accounts describes pauper graves as often left open, creating unpleasant smells and risks to public health. Broken coffins were piled up in the churchyard's south west corner next to an area used as an informal public convenience (figure x 6). The Heritors then order this area be fenced off to use for coffin storage.

<sup>103</sup> Methane flames are seen over the graves at night. An official public health and sanitation report on the state of the churchyard mentions black liquid oozing through the wall into St Catherine's Wynd. Complaints that graves are dug too short, with the gravedigger reportedly seen jumping on the top of coffins to get them into graves.

<sup>104</sup> The gates are meant to be open to the public from 8 am to 8 pm. The superintendent reports that the gates are locked to prevent mill girls from eating their lunch there and creating a mess.

<sup>105</sup> The newspaper letter describes how 'Quiet graves add to the associations that give a charm to the homeliest scene. But someone there all hours of the day, making it more difficult for quiet reflection'.

<sup>106</sup> Specific concerns voiced included overgrown grass, path borders not properly trimmed. Superintendent must be negligent. As grounds are frequented by visitors to town as well as by inhabitants the Heritors cite the importance of good maintenance.

- 1875 Heritors still unhappy with the churchyards' condition. A temporary summer gardener is appointed to cut the grass, clean the walks and generally assist the superintendent in putting the site in order.
- 1876 Heritors agreed to continue paying a summer gardener, making this a permanent annual expenditure from 1877.
- 1878 Heritors AGM decided to appoint a committee of three members to deal with requests to erect monuments<sup>107</sup> and to initiate a lair sale drive with modest success – 5 lairs.
- 1880 Heritors resolve to reiterate request to the Burgh magistrates that a police constable should patrol the churchyard to prevent injury to the grounds and preserve order due to the high number of visitors. A similar request was made in 1881.
- 1884 Cannon removed to a local public park.  
Thomas Sinclair dies and David Scott is appointed as churchyard superintendent.
- 1886 Lair sale drive results in 7 sold.  
Heritors meeting notes satisfaction with the good order and condition of churchyard grounds.
- 1888 Regulation to access amended to exclude prams and unattended children<sup>108</sup>.  
The Heritors requested the town magistrates have a policeman patrol the Abbey grounds from time to time to enforce the locking of the west gate.
- 1889 Inspection by the Churchyard Management Committee finds fault with condition of vegetation and grass, and with general untidiness. Superintendent instructed to clear vegetation and debris and to cut grass and place grounds put in good order as soon as possible.<sup>109</sup>
- 1890 Heritors discuss again the problems from high footfall and need for police presence to help prevent damage.<sup>110</sup>
- 1893 George Robertson, official custodian of the Abbey in state care, complains that the public, especially visitors to Dunfermline, were inconvenienced by the locking of the west gate during the day.

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<sup>107</sup> Since 1860 gravestone applications had been dealt with by the Churchyard Managing Committee.

<sup>108</sup> No inebriated or disorderly person will be allowed to enter the Grounds and Loungers and Idlers will be dismissed. No person in charge of a Perambulator and no children without attendants will be admitted. The use of the Grounds by visitors for picnics and by people for taking meals is prohibited. No person will be allowed to smoke within the gates. No dogs will be admitted.

<sup>109</sup> Problems noted included: grass overgrown in some places, many grave-room enclosures in an untidy state, with some containing decayed trees and bushes, articles at the NW part of the church that had apparently been used when the stones were repaired but not removed, and tombstone that had fallen out of the wall at the NE corner of the churchyard. The Superintendent instructed to see that no rubbish placed in the churchyard, including near the Frater Hall.

<sup>110</sup> Heritors discuss again the high footfall on holidays and 'on any occasion when Excursion Trains are expected' and difficulties in maintaining order and preventing damage to the gravestone and flowers, when thousands visitors may come through the grounds. It was noted that police patrols were previously carried out and should be continued ensure order, especially on holidays.

- Heritors decided to postpone action until there was hard proof that the public were being inconvenienced.
- 1894 OS map - XXXVIII.8.10 notes the location of the Pitreavie and Elgin vaults.

**Figure 18 Annotated OS Town Plan 1894 showing labelled points of interest**

- 1895 Official public health and sanitation report on the Old Churchyard calls for the closure of both the Old Churchyard and 'ideally' the New Churchyard.<sup>111</sup>
- David Scott resigns as Churchyard Superintendent.
- 1896 Tool house<sup>112</sup> built by east gate (figure x 5).
- 1898 The west steps and entrance gate entirely re-modelled following a design by Rowand Anderson into their present form. From this point all three entrances gates were kept unlocked during the day. Last sale of two lairs in open ground.
- 1900-1 Outshot section J opened with 60 new lairs to purchase<sup>113</sup>.
- 1925 Church of Scotland Property and Endowments Act automatically transfers responsibility for Abbey Churchyard from the Heritors to the Parish Council.
- 1926/7 Parish Council assumes the running of the graveyard.

**Modern Investigation**

- 1972 Memorial inscription surveys carried out by JF Mitchell published by the Scottish Genealogy Society.
- 1993 Memorial Inscription survey carried out by Shelia Pitcairn published by the Scottish Genealogy Society.
- 2013-16 Gravestone recording co-ordinated by Sue Mowat DCHP.

**Figure 19 Graveyard survey areas**

- 2015 Young Archaeologists Club make plans of the graveyard.
- 2017-19 Gravestone recording co-ordinated by Mark Seaborne, Young Archaeology Club director and professional archaeologist<sup>114</sup>.

**Figure 20 Historic Environment Scotland Properties in Care Boundary**

**Figure 21 Historic Environment Scotland Scheduled Monument Boundary**

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<sup>111</sup> See 1895 entry for Old Churchyard, the recommendation to close the New Churchyard was not advanced.

<sup>112</sup> During building work labourers uncovered a circular well or cesspit about 3 feet (90cm) in diameter, with a culvert entering it from the north and another leaving it at the south. Both well and culverts were built of the same stone as the palace and the old church.

<sup>113</sup> These were double the price of other lairs in the churchyard and purchased by well-to-do local figures.

<sup>114</sup> Query confirm extent of coverage of YAC projects for New Churchyard



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