
9 Other Excavations

Small-scale archaeological investigations have been carried out within the South Transept, in 1981 in the Choir Vestry and, during installation of a new organ in 1990–1, during reflooring of the Choir in 1993, and around the North Transept in 1992.

9.1 Choir Vestry excavations

Subsequent to the 1981 excavations in the South Choir Aisle, limited excavation was carried out later in the same year by Peter Raisen and Derek Hall below the floor of the Choir Vestry which lay in the crypt area below the southernmost bay of the South Transept ([illus 6](#); [illus 30](#); [illus 31](#)). The floor level in the Vestry (at *c* 87.40m AOD) was 2.30m below the main church floor above; excavation was limited to a depth of 0.90m below this.

The original site records were not available at the time of the compilation of this report but an interim report and a summary description of the stratigraphy encountered had been prepared immediately after the excavation, and this has been used as the basis of this account ([Raisen & Hall, undated](#)). The finds from these excavations were deposited at the time with Edinburgh City Museums and Galleries and they are included in the relevant sections below, especially within the medieval pottery report, as a good assemblage of East Coast White Gritty Ware was recovered.

The earliest deposit was a substantial layer of firm yellow-brown clay (ECV C120) extending over the whole of the exposed area, with its upper surface at *c* 86.70 AOD. A single burial was found cut into the upper surface of this clay.

Above the clay, and sealing the burial, were two distinct sequential deposits, ECV C118, a mixture of disturbed clay and brown loam with much shattered stone (identified by the excavators as possible waste from stone dressing), and a midden deposit (ECV C114) containing deposits of ash, pottery and animal bone, with a suggested 13th-century date for the pottery. Two burials had been made through this midden deposit prior to the deposition of a firm clay loam (ECV C101), which had several burials cut into it.

Along the south edge of the excavated area, the foundations of a stone wall, running east to west were exposed, almost certainly the footings of the original wall of the Transept when it was extended *c* 1500. The extant south wall of the Choir Vestry (and the Transept above) lay a small distance to the south of these footings, apparently constructed during Burn's reworking of this area in the 1820s.

In the upper level of clay (ECV C101), part of the

stone foundation for a pier was exposed, and this may have formed part of the original superstructure of the crypt area formed below the South Transept at the time of its extension *c* 1500.

On the east side of the Vestry a blocked arch was uncovered within the original fabric of the Transept. It may originally have housed a tomb or effigy but subsequently it had been partially walled up to form a narrow rectangular space, heavily blackened with soot, with a flue leading out from it up the east side of the wall. A reference to the use of the adjacent Montrose vault as a coal-cellar immediately prior to the restoration of the South Transept in 1879–80 is relevant in this regard (article in *The Architect*, 21 August 1880, 125, quoted in [Addyman & Kay 2001](#), 105).

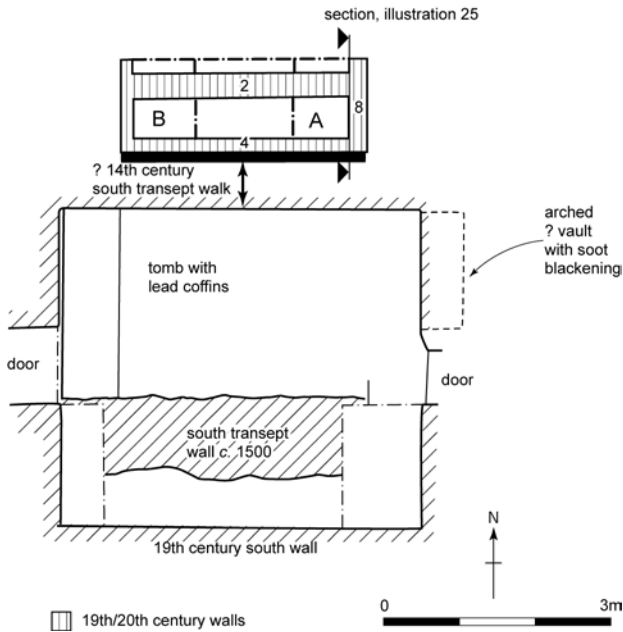
Along the west side of the Vestry, post-dating the construction of the Transept, was a tomb, seen to contain three lead coffins and fragments of a wooden one. The place has long been associated with the tomb of the Regent Moray who died in 1570 but no evidence was found to confirm this was his tomb. There was a plaque beside one of the coffins bearing the inscription: 'Francis Steuart Esq. Died at Rheims 7th October 1768. Aged 22'. The coffins were left undisturbed and the tomb was resealed.

9.2 Installation of the new organ, 1990–1

The installation of a new organ within the South Transept required excavation for concrete footings, including two deep pits ([illus 30](#), A and B) which had to be taken down to solid deposits at depth. The initial excavation of these foundations was carried out by building contractors but, following the discovery of *in situ* stone walls and articulated human skeletons, the remainder of the excavation was carried out by staff from the City of Edinburgh District Council Archaeology Service. The pits were very limited in plan (a maximum of 1.1m by 0.70m) and datable finds were absent. However, the stratigraphic sequence, which was identical in both foundation pits, is of value in considering the development of the south side of the church, and is described here and shown in section ([illus 31](#)).

At the base of the pits, a deep deposit of firm clay (ESG91 C21), with its upper surface at *c* 87.35m AOD, was encountered. Excavation to a depth of more than 1m into the deposit showed that it was clearly redeposited with a sequence of layers of differing clays, some with a high fraction of sand, and at the base a deposit of clean yellow sand.

Above this, two distinct sequential deposits, both compact dark loams (ESG91 C20 & C17), had been



Illus 30 Plan of South Transept showing features recorded in 1981 (Choir Vestry excavations) and 1990-1 (organ foundation excavations)

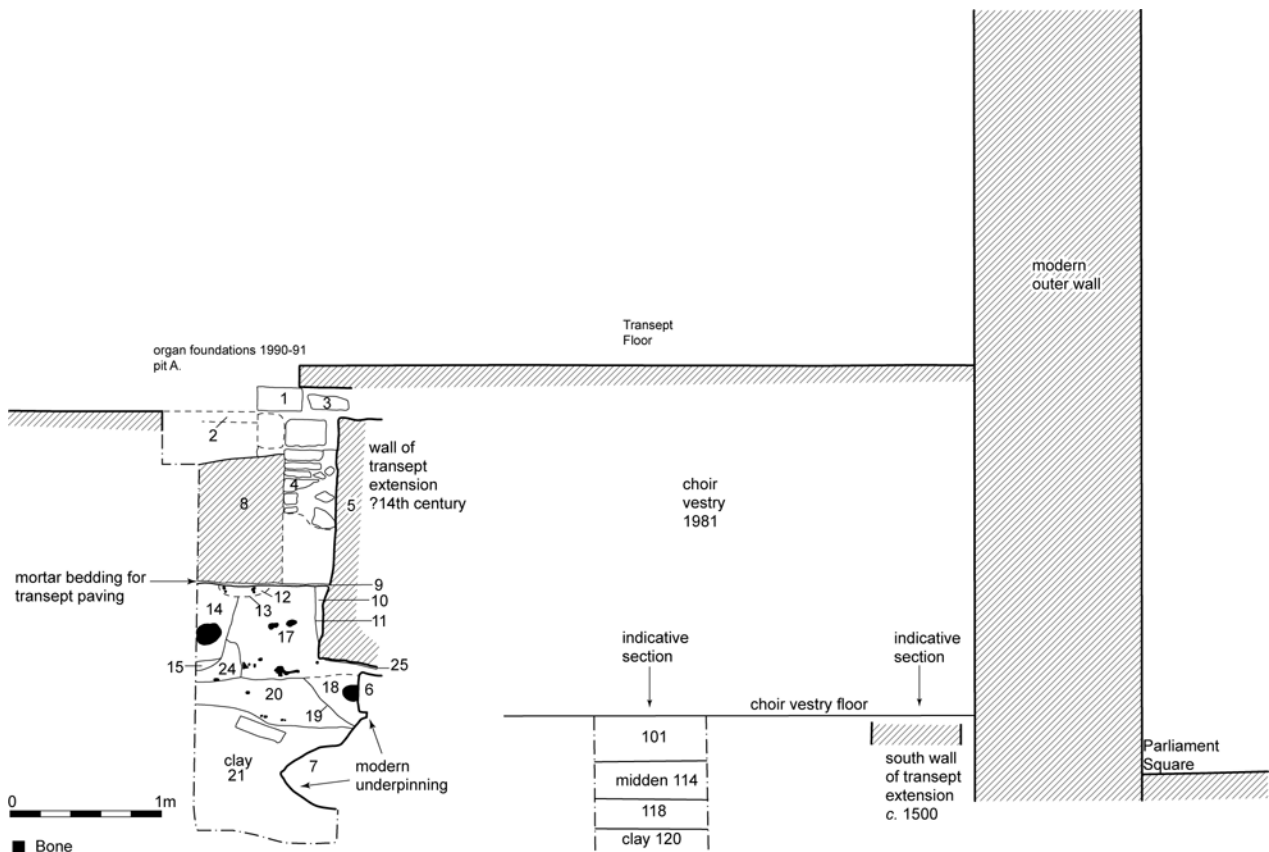
deposited and/or accumulated to depth of almost 1m, with the upper surface of C17 lying at c 88.20m AOD. Both deposits were the matrix for a number of *in situ* burials, none showing any signs of an associated coffin, although copper-alloy pins, presumably

used as shroud fastenings, were found. C17 was then clearly cut by the construction trench for a coursed rubble wall (ESG91 C5), the upper level of which lay just beneath the modern floor of the South Transept. The south face of this wall was also exposed within the Choir Vestry excavations. Against its north face, and over the fill of the construction trench, a deposit of mortar (ESG91 C9) was probably the bedding for paving of the floor contemporary with the wall. It can be presumed that the wall (ESG91 C5) was the external south wall of the Transept prior to its expansion by the addition of St Anthony's Aisle to the south in c 1500.

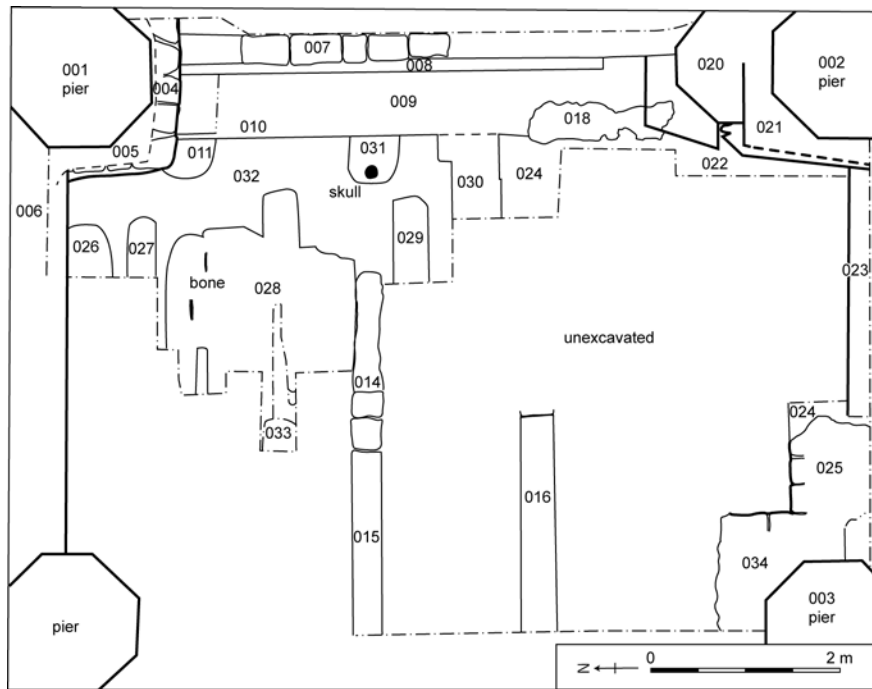
Above the mortar surface was a sequence of sleeper walls (ESG91 C4, C8 & C22) and ducts for the sub-floor heating system, all associated with the 19th-century building works in this area, and with the foundations of the original organ.

9.3 Reflooring of the Choir, 1993

In January 1993, monitoring of the installation of underfloor heating within the central area of the Choir (illus 6) required the removal of loose rubble and overburden to a depth of 0.25m. The discovery, in the early stages of the work in the second bay of the Choir, of wall remains and clear evidence for graves led to a revised methodology for the works in the rest of the Choir, with excavation subsequently confined within the 19th-century rubble to protect the



Illus 31 Section across South Transept, information from 1981 Choir Vestry excavations and 1990-1 organ foundation excavations



Illus 32 The Choir 1992: plan of recorded features

archaeological remains. Within the area of original ground reduction, the archaeological features, where exposed, were recorded in plan (illus 32) but no further investigation was carried out.

Removal of the 19th-century floor and rubble make-up revealed an extensive spread of pinkish-brown clay (ESG93 C32) across the width of the Choir, into which a series of clearly distinguishable graves had been cut; these were clearly truncated, as *in situ* human bone could be seen in the surface of the fills. Its upper surface lay at *c* 89.05m AOD. Although no dating evidence was recovered, the area of investigation was the site of the high altar in the later medieval church, and it is notable that at least some of the graves lay directly beneath where the altar must have stood.

The conclusion that the burials are likely to pre-date the extension of the earlier medieval church is reinforced by the fact that the sub-base foundation (ESG93 C4) of the northern pier (ESG93 C1) at the junction of the first and second bay, sat directly on top of the boulder clay and clearly overlay a grave (ESG93 C11) on its south side. The carved heraldic shields displayed on the pier above are dated by heraldry to *c* 1453 (RCAHMS 32), giving at least a *terminus ante quem* for both the clay and grave, although by analogy with similar deposits described elsewhere in this report, it is likely that both the clay, and the graves cutting it, date from several centuries earlier. The footing was only two courses in depth, and the floor level of the later medieval church in this area must have been almost identical to that of the modern church, as demonstrated by the top of the footings (ESG93 C21) of the corresponding southern pier (ESG93 C2) which lay only 0.07m below the present floor level. The footings of

the southern pier extended deeper than those of the northern, and the surface of the clay was not seen in this area as it sloped away to the south.

Between the footings of the eastern piers of the bay, across the full width of the central Choir, ran a shallow robber trench (ESG93 C10), broad but shallow, with sharp vertical edges. Filled with a loose rubbly deposit (ESG93 C9), which contained fragments of tile or brick, its eastern edge was not seen as it lay beneath a later sleeper wall (ESG93 C8), but its western edge was coincidental with the western face of the columns between which it ran. This robber trench, and also presumably the structure which was removed by the robbing, cut through graves in this area. It is suggested that this structure may have been part of the high altar in the mid-15th-century and later medieval church, and may perhaps be seen as the footing for the reredos. At the southern end, adjacent to the pier (ESG93 C2), was a polygonal plinth (ESG93 20) of mortared ashlar blocks, supported on a massive single stone foundation block. The relationship with the column was obscured by mortar but the plinth seems to be contemporary with the pier. The plinth seems likely to have formed part of the structure of the high altar.

Two rubble wall foundations (ESG93 C25 & C34) were partially exposed, running between the piers of the bay. Although their relationship with the pier footings here was not clear, these walls were similar in form and function to those recorded in the excavations in the South Choir Aisle which had been constructed in Period 3b, either as below-ground buttressing between piers during the alterations in the Choir and its southern aisle of the 1450s, or simply as sleeper walls.

All other features recorded were post-medieval in date.

9.4 North Transept, 1992

In 1992, two watching briefs were carried during the excavation of service trenches inside and

outside the door of the North Transept ([Johnston 1992a](#); [Johnston 1992b](#)) ([illus 6](#)). Inside the northern doorway, sandstone bedrock was observed immediately below the floor at 87.87m AOD, while monitoring of a service trench along the northern side of the church showed that bedrock in this area lay at *c* 86.93m AOD, again immediately below the modern ground level.