STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

BLACKFRIARS CHAPEL, ST ANDREWS

We continually revise our Statements of Significance, so they may vary in length, format and level of detail. While every effort is made to keep them up to date, they should not be considered a definitive or final assessment of our properties.

BLACKFRIAR'S CHAPEL, ST ANDREW'S

SYNOPSIS

The property is all that survives above ground of the Dominican friary of St Andrews (commonly called Blackfriars). Set up in the mid-1400s, the friary was given new life when funds were bequeathed in 1514 by Bishop Elphinstone of Aberdeen, allowing new building. The present fragment dates from then.

The property comprises a ruined chapel that once projected from the north wall of the friary church. Polygonal on plan, it is covered by a pointed barrel vault and has some fine window tracery.

CHARACTER OF THE MONUMENT

Historical Overview:

- 1215 - the Dominican (Black) Friars are established by St Dominic at Toulouse, France. The order's first house in Scotland is Edinburgh (c.1230) and nine more follow before 1300, all in towns.
- 1464 - first mention of a Dominican friary in St Andrews. It was probably established shortly earlier. It seems only to have had no more than two friars.
- 1476/7 - a bull of Pope Sixtus IV orders 'that the places of the Friar Preachers in St Andrews and St Monans, hitherto known as oratories or hospices, shall be named conventual houses and the friars shall have liberty to erect churches and monastic buildings.'
- 1514 - William Elphinstone, bishop of Aberdeen, in his will leaves the residue of his estate to the Dominicans to build a convent in St Andrews.
- 1516 - the Dominicans build a new 'convent of friars living according to the rule and engaged continually in the study of sacred letters'. The convent's refounding is overseen by John Adamson, provincial head of the Dominicans, and George Hepburn, dean of Dunkeld. The friary is endowed to maintain five friars.
- 1519 - the friaries of Cupar and St Monans are united with St Andrews. The hospital of St Nicholas follows in 1529.
- 1525 - Archbishop James Beaton gives permission to the prior and convent to 'build and set forth upon the streets', ten feet beyond the north wall of the friary, an aisle or chapel of their church 'because thair awne rowme betwixt thai said north wall and thair kirk is not sufficient and lairge for the lenthe of theyle foirsaid'. This appears to relate directly to the construction of the surviving fragment.
- 1559 (June) - the friars are 'violently expelled from their destroyed place' by the Protestant Reformers.
- 1567 - Queen Mary grants the property to the burgh of St Andrews.
- 1642 - Gordon of Rothiemay's plan of St Andrews shows the polygonal north chapel but no trace of any related building, suggesting that the other buildings had been demolished in the intervening period.
- 18th century - a house is built against the chapel's east wall.
- 1832 - Madras College, designed by William Burn, is built to the south of the site of the friary cloister and conventual buildings.
- 1911 - the property is taken into state care.

Archaeological Overview:
- There are no records of any archaeological work having been carried out within the chapel itself. There is the distinct possibility of burials.
- The church to which the chapel was attached, along with the cloister and conventual buildings, was located to the chapel's south. This area, now a grass lawn but formerly a gravelled playground for Madras College, has significant archaeological potential to reveal more of the plan and history of the Dominican Friary. John Geddy's plan of St Andrews, published c. 1580 but seemingly depicting the town in its pre-Reformation days, helpfully shows the Dominican Friary substantially intact.
- Archaeological work associated with a floodlighting scheme in 1995 located demolition rubble not far below ground level, possibly representing the demolished remains of the friary church and cloister.
- In September 2008, a non-intrusive geophysical survey was conducted by the University of St Andrews of the lawned area. The results are pending.

Architectural/Artistic Overview:
- St Andrews Blackfriars is one of only a handful of churches of the mendicant (begging) orders in Scotland to have survived above ground. It is one of only three Dominican friaries with upstanding remains , of the others, St Monans wasn't built as a friary originally, whilst the remains at Inverness consist of a solitary column. Despite the ruinous condition of the chapel, enough survives to indicate that St Andrews Blackfriars was a complex building, with a mixture of Scottish and Low Countries influences.
- The chapel is polygonal on plan, originally with corner buttresses which have been cut back. It has traceried windows surviving in three of its four sides. The fifth side, facing east, was built solid to take the altar.
- There is an ogee-head aumbry in the south end of the east wall. A blocked door to its left, in the position of the altar, probably dates from the 18th century, when the transept was incorporated into a house built against this wall.
- The chapel has a pointed tunnel vault with applied surface ribs imitating quadripartite vaulting. The remaining boss is carved with the arms of Christ's Passion. One of the supporting corbels bears the arms of Hepburn, probably for Dean George Hepburn, Bishop Elphinstone's executor.
- Though the polygonal shape had Scottish precedents - at Ladykirk, Berwickshire (which has apsidal transeptal chapels), and the two-storey aisle at Arbuthnot, Kincardineshire , the chapel seems more likely to have been influenced by Low Countries' models (e.g., Delft, Zaltbommel and Leiden). The window tracery is composed of uncusped loop-like forms which originate in the brick architecture of the Low Countries, where variants can be found in the late 15[th]century churches of Kapelle and Kloetinge, Zeeland, and more elaborately in the Dominican Friary in The Hague (c.1500).

Social Overview:
- St Andrews Blackfriars is an important element of the social landscape of the burgh, helping to contribute towards the town's medieval character.
- The chapel is not normally accessible. However, it forms part of a popular recreational space, particularly for students from Madras College during term

time. Other than that, it serves little community use. That the public benches are turned away from it emphasises its psychological isolation.
- Despite being advertised in town leaflets, it is not a notable tourist attraction. However, its central location means that it can unexpectedly attract attention.

Spiritual Overview:
- St Andrews Blackfriars is one of only a few medieval friaries surviving in Scotland, and as such is important in our understanding of the role mendicant friars played in the spiritual lives of later medieval urban communities.
- St Andrews Blackfriars, as with all friaries, was an early target of the Protestant reformers. In religious trials prior to the Reformation, it was often Dominicans who were used as measures of orthodoxy. It was possibly a Dominican from St Andrews Blackfriars who drafted the Catholic reform Catechism, published under Archbishop John Hamilton's name in 1551.
- Today, St Andrews Blackfriars maintains an identity as a ruined chapel, but no longer serves any spiritual use.

Aesthetic Overview:
- As a ruin, the chapel shares the Romantic notions of the cathedral priory, a character distinct from the relatively complete medieval forms of St Salvator's Chapel and the tower of Holy Trinity Church, and evokes the feeling of 'the medieval' , an important component in the town's identity.

- St Andrews Blackfriars' former spiritual role is at odds with its present setting, surrounded as it is by noise of traffic and people.

- The property can be visually arresting, especially when South Street is quiet.

What are the major gaps in understanding of the property?
- What was on the site of the Blackfriars prior to the mid 15th century.
- What did the rest of the Dominican friary look like?

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Key Points
- The chapel is one of only a few surviving medieval friaries in Scotland.
- The architectural links with the Low Countries shows how religious orders could act as conduits for architectural and artistic ideas.

Associated Properties:

(other related local sites) – **St Andrews Cathedral**; St Salvator's Chapel.
(other upstanding friary churches in Scotland) - St Monans (Dominican); Inverness (Dominican); Elgin (Observant Franciscan); Dunbar (Trinitarian); Luffness (Carmelite); Queensferry (Carmelite).

Keywords:

friary, Dominican, mendicant, tracery, vault

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