

# Report of Archaeological fieldwork at Kinloss Abbey

This report covers initial resistivity surveys conducted on 12th December 2024, 17<sup>th</sup> January 2025 and 19<sup>th</sup> February 2025; plus, a fieldwalking exercise on the 26<sup>th</sup> of March 2025.



Figure 1. Southeast of the Abbey of Kinloss, drawn from the North Yard, by Henry Hutton, 1827. Available: National Library Scotland.

## Introduction

The Cistercian abbey of Kinloss was established in 1150 by David I of Scotland. The abbey was a daughter house of Melrose abbey, from where the first abbot, Abbot Anselm, 1151-74, came. Kinloss Abbey remained a central focus of monastic life in the northeast of Scotland until the reformation of 1560. Amongst its twenty-two abbots Robert Reid, 1528-53, has the highest profile: being a central figure in the monastic, educational and diplomatic spheres of Scottish history. Following the Reformation the final abbot, Walter Reid, nephew of Robert Reid, commenced the selling off its monastic lands and the fabric of the monastery for building material. The scale of the demolition process at the abbey, effectively a standing quarry, was emphasised by the sale of stone to Cromwellian forces for the construction of the citadel at Inverness in 1650. The systematic removal of stone for recycling provided building

material for local civic and agricultural buildings. This continued until the 1840s, when a public outcry was successful in preventing further destruction.

Little remains of this once expansive abbey. Of the main abbey complex only the south transept and the west and south cloister walls remain upstanding. These are situated within the oldest part of the current graveyard. Immediately south of the graveyard are the remains of the Abbot's house; currently undergoing preservation work by the Kinloss Abbey Trust. The land on which the abbey / graveyard and Abbot's house stand is owned by Moray Council (MC) and is under the protection of Historic Environment Scotland (HES).

This report represents the first phase of an archaeological investigation into Kinloss Abbey.

### **Overall Project Aims:**

- Locate, using resistivity surveys, the extent of the monastic complex outside of the current graveyard area. The permission for this has been granted by the farmer. The focus of this is to establish the original abbey precinct, for example the precinct wall, and the locations of infirmaries and monastic buildings. In addition, the storerooms and light-industrial areas associated with the role of the lay brothers. It is probable that many of the storerooms and light industrial buildings will be to the west of the complex, and therefore likely to be beneath the improvement period steading of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This survey will be augmented by fieldwalking exercises.
- Investigate, using resistivity surveys, the abbey complex within the graveyard. Permission to undertake non-invasive surveys at Kinloss Abbey, Scheduled Monument (SM) 1227, has been granted by HES.
- Locate the water source for the abbey. This was either routed via a lade or piped into the monastic complex from the east. Establish any link between this and the culvert within and to the west of the Abbot's house; then its route onwards to Kinloss Burn.
- Establish the extent of the Abbot's house and its physical connection to the abbey complex using resistivity surveys. Permission to undertake non-invasive surveys has been granted by HES.
- Undertake a full study of the standing buildings to understand the chronology of its construction.

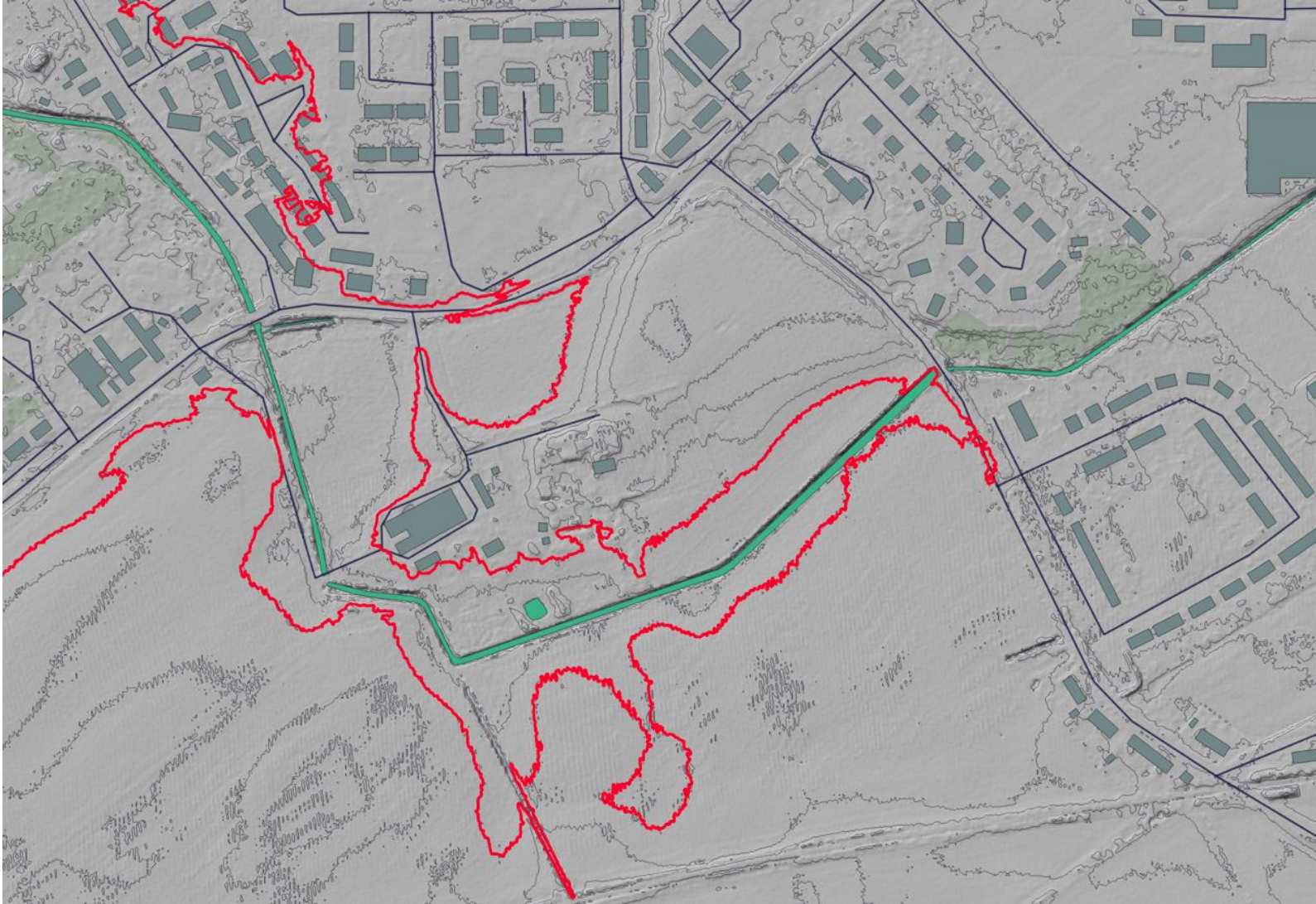


Figure 2. LiDAR image highlighting the 4m contour.

Image by M. Sharpe.

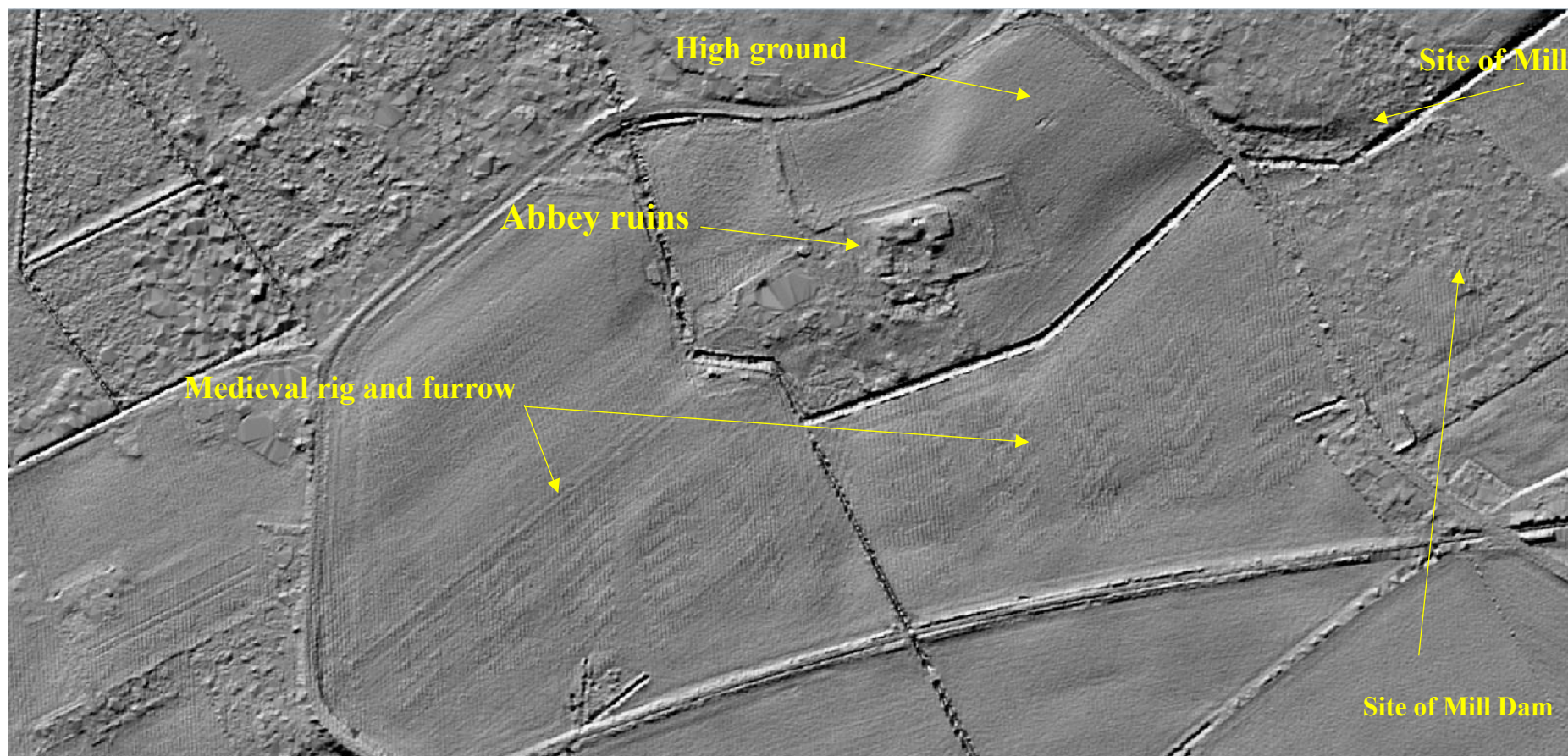


Figure 3. LiDAR image of the wider abbey precinct. The promontory to the east of the abbey site can be clearly seen. South of the Kinloss Burn is evidence of Medieval rig and furrow. The location of the 18<sup>th</sup> century mill and dam, Figures 4 & 5, is highlighted.



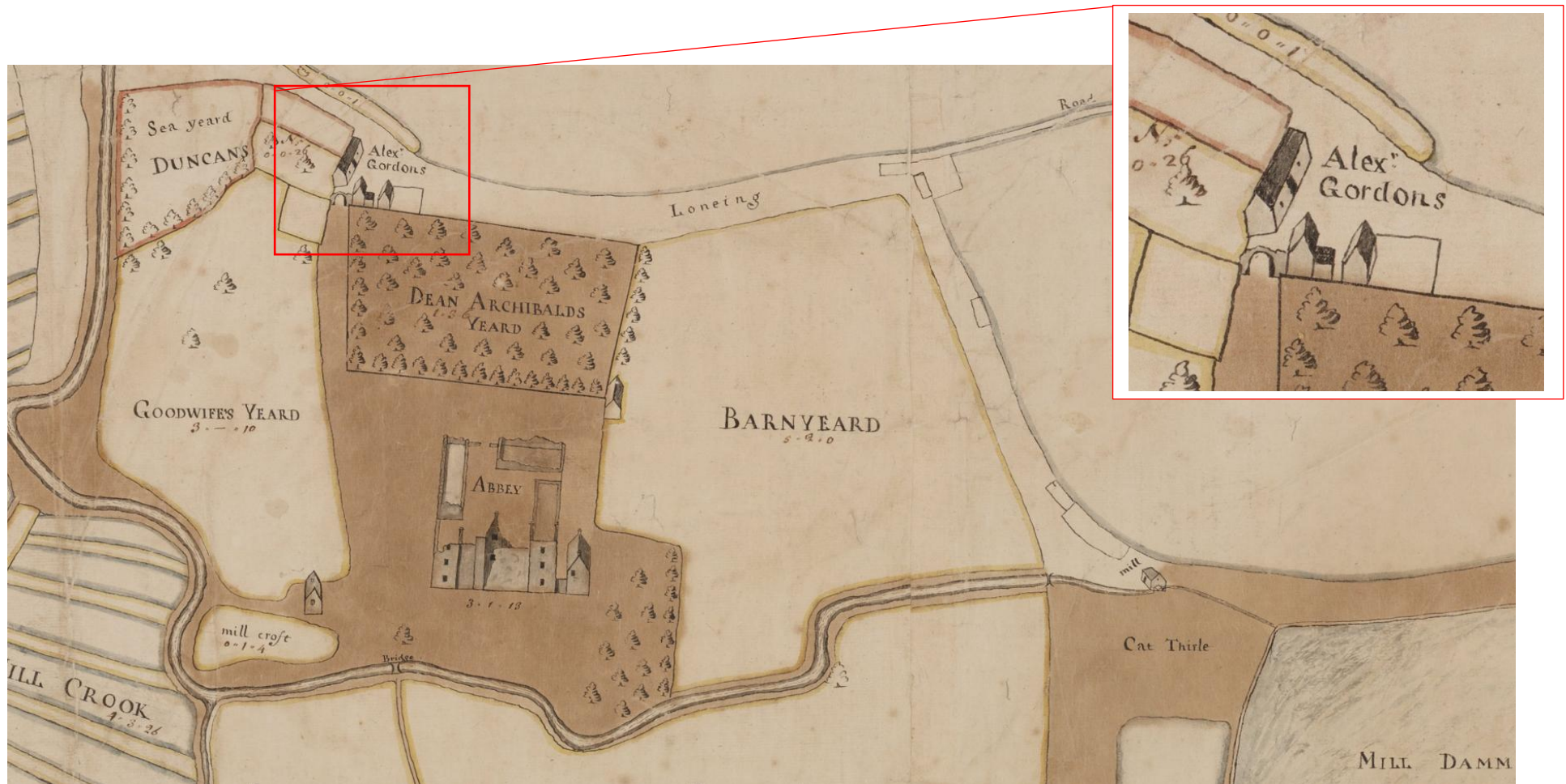


Figure 5. 1746 survey centred on the abbey ruins. Note the separation between Dean Archibalds Yeard and the abbey ruins and the building at its southeast corner. Note in inset the archway over the road leading to the abbey at Alex' Gordons buildings.

## Fieldwork 12<sup>th</sup> December 2024 to 26<sup>th</sup> March 2025.

Before the start of this phase, it was important to understand the topography of Kinloss Abbey. Figure 2 shows the LiDAR image with the four-meter contour highlighted in red. Cistercian abbeys are invariably located on promontories with watercourses surrounding them on two or more sides, in Figures 2 & 3 this promontory is clearly seen. Figures 4 & 5 are from the 1746 survey by William Anderson; this is the earliest known survey of the area.

### Resistivity

Following the permission of the farmer resistivity surveys were planned during the period between the December 2024 and ploughing. The initial surveys were located within the large ‘horseshoe’ shaped field which wraps around the south, east and north side of Kinloss Abbey graveyard. Also, the small field to the west of the access lane from the B9011 to the graveyard entrance (Figure 6). These were Target Areas (TA) 1, 2 & 6.



Figure 6. Google Earth image with target areas 1 – 8 marked.

TAs 3 – 5, 7 & 8 are with SM 1227. TAs 3 – 5 are within the Abbot’s house compound, and are positioned to assess the original size of the building and its connection to the monastery complex. TA 7 is situated to locate the chapter house and kitchen / warming room. TA 8 to locate storerooms. It is intended to survey these during the summer of 2025.

TA 1 & 2, both 20m x 40m, were located to search for Alex Gordon's buildings, (Figure 6). These buildings are potentially the repurposed monastic gatehouse to the abbey. Within the inset an arch is clearly shown, the detail of the top of the arch indicates damage. TA 6, 20m x 20m, was located on top of the rise to locate the building shown at the southeast corner of Dean Archibalds Yard. Unfortunately, the ground around TA 1 & 2 proved to be saturated and the results were inconclusive. TA 6, on higher ground, proved encouraging, however the grid size was too small gain a clear picture (Figure 7).

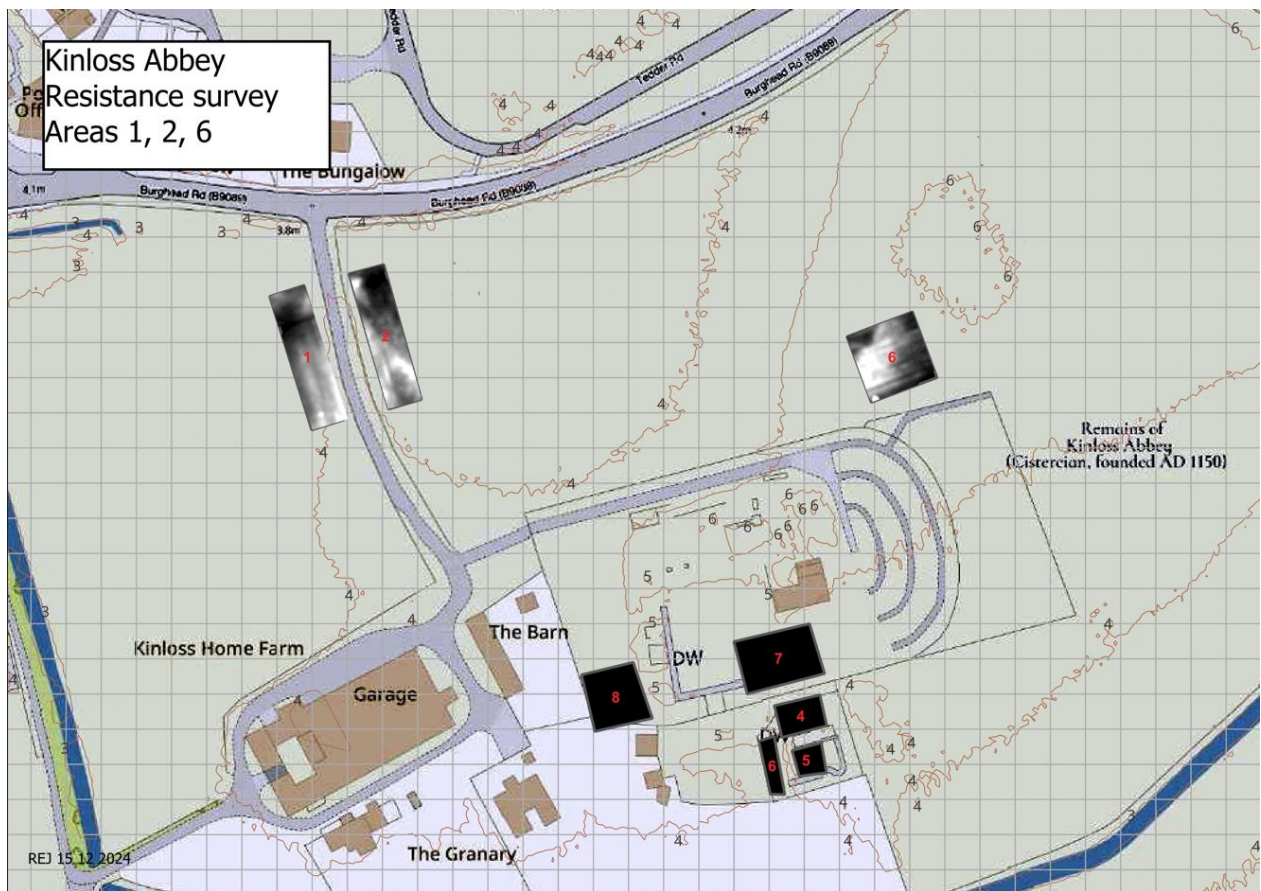


Figure 7. Results from resistivity survey 12<sup>th</sup> Dec 2024.

Image by R. Jones.

The site was revisited on the 17<sup>th</sup> Jan 2025. The areas of TA1 & 2 remained too wet to survey. TA 6 was extended to a 40m x 40m grid. Acting on information from the farmer, who reported large 'worked stones' in the area adjacent to the Abbot's House during ploughing, TA 9, 20m x 40m, was set up running north-south. Both TA 6 and TA 9 revealed interesting features. TA6, (Figure 8), indicates high resistance areas, although the orientation and scale could be un-associated and predate the monastic period. TA9, (Figure 9), displays a complex pattern of straight lines, requiring further expansion of the grid for detail.



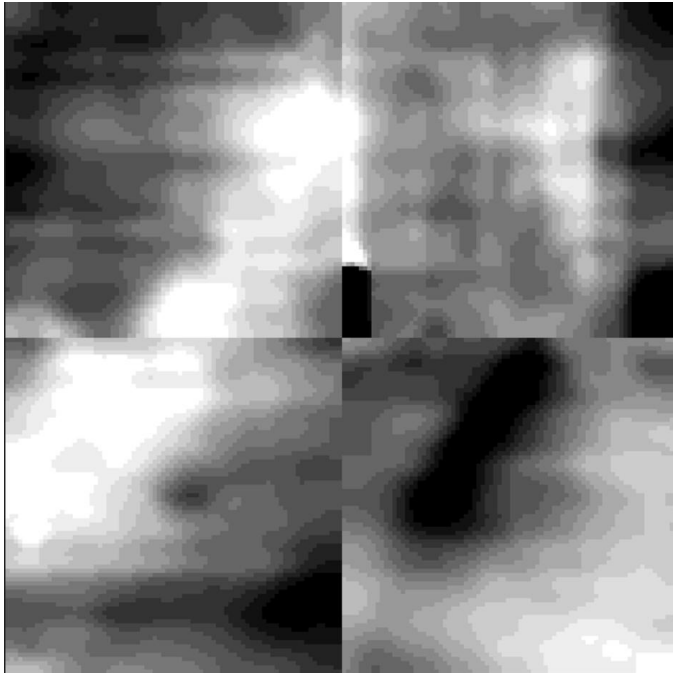


Figure 8. Expanded TA6. 40m x 40m grid.

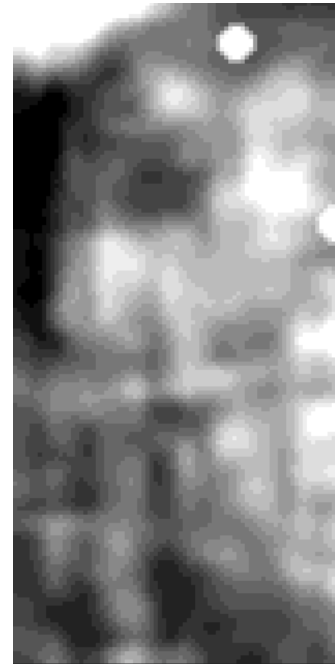


Figure 9. TA9. 20m x 20m grid.

The site was surveyed again on 19<sup>th</sup> February 2025. At TA2 the ground had dried out, a 40m x 40m grid was surveyed. The results from TA2 remain inconclusive, (Figure 10), but will benefit from further expansion of the data set.

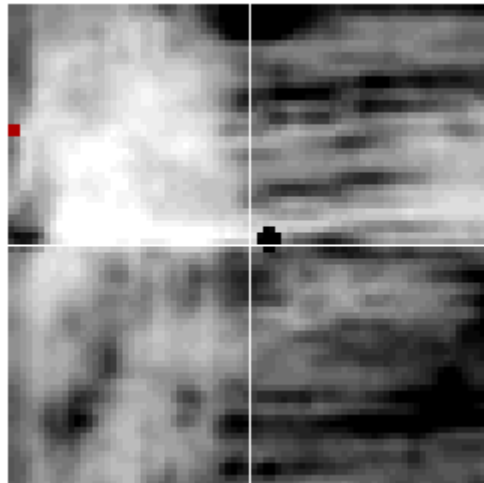


Figure 10. Enlarged TA 2. 40m x 40m grid.

TA9 was enlarged to a 40m x 40m grid. The results indicate a high resistance area, see the bottom right-hand corner (Figure 11). This is coincident with the report from the farmer. TA9 warrants further expansion to the east.

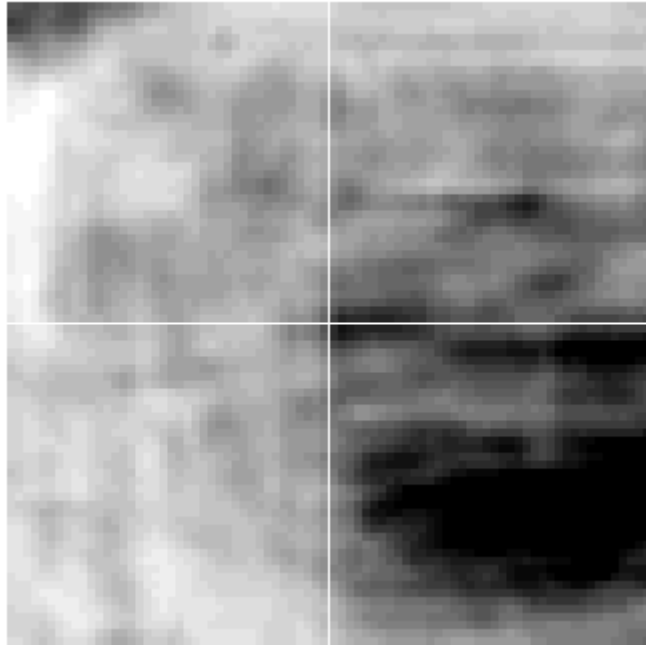


Figure 11. Enlarged TA 9. 40m x 40m grid.

Due to the topography of the field, it was decided to place an exploratory 20m x 20m, grid at TA10, (Figure 12). This was designed to search for the building at the southeast corner of Dean Archibalds Yard, (Figure 5), The eastern edge of the yard is set at an angle roughly corresponding to the base of the slope, (Figures 2 & 3). The data recovered indicates a high resistance area and again warrants extending the resistivity surveys north and eastwards along the base of the slope.

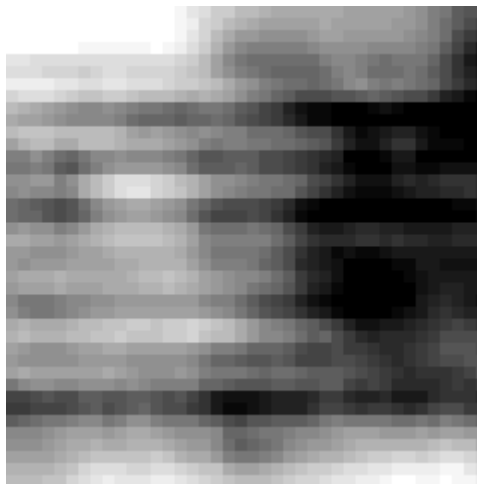


Figure 12. TA 10. 20m x 20m grid.

This was the final opportunity to conduct resistivity surveys; the field being ploughed shortly afterwards in preparation from the next crop. An overview of these surveys is at Figure 13.



Figure 13. Record of Resistivity surveys completed at Kinloss Abbey on 17 Jan and 19 Feb 2025

## Fieldwalking

After the fields surrounding Kinloss Abbey were ploughed the opportunity to undertake a fieldwalking exercise existed. This took place on the 26<sup>th</sup> March 2025.

## Methodology



Figure 14. Fieldwalking areas outlined in red.

The plan of action was to fieldwalk the small field between the west of the access lane and Kinloss Burn, Fieldwalking Area 1 (FWA1). Fieldwalking Area 2 (FWA2), a 50m wide band from the southside of the graveyard, coincident with TA9 above, followed the perimeter of the graveyard. Due to time constraints, it was only possible to complete the southern and part of the eastern boundary of the graveyard, (Figure 14).

The areas were walked by five people in line, approximately 2m apart. FWA1 had been recently ploughed, while FWA2 had been ploughed and graded. The weather was dry with a light wind. The locations of medieval and prehistoric objects were individually bagged and locations recorded, (Figure 15). Post medieval pottery from midden spreading was bulk bagged, locations were not recorded.



Figure 15. Record of Artefacts recovered during Fieldwalking exercise on 26 Mar 2025

## Results

FWA1 had by far the greater number of finds.

Five flint sherds were found, three in FWA1 and two in FWA2. (Figure 16).

There were 38 ceramic finds, these are possibly Medieval gritty ware the majority of which are evenly spread across FWA1, (Figure 17).

There were 67 pieces of glazed pottery found, ranging from fine table wear, green glaze pottery to glazed jug handles, (Figure 18).

There were 10 pieces of industrial waste. These consisted of heavily heat damaged material with possible melted glass fused into them, (Figure 19).

A single metal spindle whorl, (Figure 20).

Several pieces of coloured vessel glass from FWA2, (Figure 21).

There were four stone objects including a large worked stone and a probable stone roof slate.

Bulk post-Medieval pottery, glass and a coin, (Figure 22).

## Discussion

Ceramic material, both gritty wear and glazed, accounted for 84% of recorded finds. Of this the glazed pottery, the largest single group, was evenly spread across both areas. The probable stone slate was found in FWA2 close to the compound fence for the Abbot's house. The metal spindle whorl was found in FWA1 near the probable location of Alex Gordon's farm buildings, and potential monastic gatehouse, seen in Figure 5, TA1. It is interesting that the industrial waste material was grouped in an arc to the northwest of FWA1. As discussed above it is likely that much of the light-industrial site associated with the lay brothers would be expected to be beneath the improvement period steading to the south of FWA1. That they are clustered in the north of that field could indicate that light industry was centred in that area, near the bridge and main road leading to Forres. If so, this may call into question the theory that the lane leading to the abbey was the primary entrance to the complex; although this does not remove the possibility that Alex Gordon's buildings were pre-existing gatehouses. On Figure 5 a bridge crosses the Kinloss Burn south and west of the Abbot's

house. This survey was completed in 1746, and therefore it is too early to speculate if that was the main entrance, or indeed another entrance to the abbey that existed prior to 1560.



Figure 16. Flint Finds.



Figure 17. Medieval Gritty Pottery.



Figure 18. Glazed Pottery.



Figure 19. Industrial Waste.





Figure 20. Metal Spindle Whorl.



Figure 21. Glass.



Figure 22. Post-Medieval pottery, fragments of glass objects and modern coin.

### **Acknowledgements**

I am indebted to Mr Douglas White, Kinloss Abbey Farm, for allowing these surveys to take place; and NOSAS for providing resistivity equipment. I must thank the following for their assistance and expertise with the fieldwork: Dr Liz Ashcroft, Dr John Barrett, Christine Clark, Bob Jones, Rosemary Jones, Daniel McLauchlan, Emma Malone, Nicola Newman and Michael Sharpe.

4<sup>th</sup> April 2025

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