

PITTODRIE BEDE HOUSE ARCHIVAL RESEARCH

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INTRODUCTION

The Bede House is located at the foot of Bennachie, at grid reference NJ 693235, 0.4 ml. (0.6 km.), southwest of Pittodrie House and just west of the ancient highway known as the Old Aberdeen Turnpike.

The most accessible account of the Bede House is to be found in A.I. McConnochie's 'Bennachie', as noted below. The authoritative online database, Canmore, gives limited descriptions, but no systematic history or chronology of the Bede House has come to light. This information gap invited further investigation. The process began without any clear idea of what questions to ask, and where the answers might be found. The questions soon emerged; the answers took a little longer, and some remain to reveal themselves!

As with an archaeological dig, the archival research started with recent material and attempted to trace its antecedents, linking back where possible to earlier and earlier sources. This paper thus attempts to trace the 'golden thread' of references to Pittodrie's Bede House back through time. The results of this investigation are then presented as a conventional timeline of events starting with the earliest available reference. As the pitfalls and high points of the quest may also be of interest, these are recounted towards the end of the paper.

SOME QUESTIONS

The meaning of 'bede house'. The term derives from 'beadsmen', a pre-Reformation designation for indigents who received alms and accommodation from a benefactor. According to Catholic belief, when the time came, such good works would speed the benefactor's progress through purgatory and subsequent elevation to heaven. In return, the beneficiaries were duty-bound to pray for the soul of their sponsor (McAleese, 2012).

The concept at Pittodrie. In Scotland, bede houses and similar establishments certainly existed in the 16th-century, and probably earlier, as evidenced by

the setting up, in 1581, of a Commission of the Scottish Parliament tasked with reforming their administration, which seems to have been suffering from misdirection, “under colour of reformation of the religion” (RPS [Records of the Parliament of Scotland], 1581/10/36).

However, while the possibility of an earlier establishment cannot be ruled out, it appears that the Erskines of Pittodrie established their Bede House c.1640. The 17th-century attitude towards the deserving poor can be inferred from the opinion of the kirk session of the parish of Oyne, who intimated in 1687 that, “those who are really indigent [as distinct from beggars and vagabonds] be maintained within their own respective parishes to whom they belong” (Mitchell, 1825, 451).

The occupants of the Pittodrie Bede House had a duty of Sunday worship in the presence of their benefactor, the laird of Pittodrie, whose lands included parts of the parishes of Oyne and Chapel of Garioch. As the available evidence shows that in this case the arrangement was initiated well after the Reformation, it should be noted that the terms ‘bede house’ and ‘bedesmen’ are anachronistic, although they clearly remained in popular use. In a literal sense the correct terminology might be ‘almshouse’ and ‘almsmen’, but this does not seem to have been applied in this instance.

The exact location of Pittodrie’s Bede House. Given the presence of field and documentary evidence of a variety of buildings and enclosure features in the general vicinity of the site, the question arose as to whether the building so named on Ordnance Survey (OS) mapping was in fact the actual bede house. This doubt was effectively dispelled by the results of the archival and archaeological investigations (see Ralston & Shepherd, this volume). However, the possibility of other structures in the vicinity having had this purpose at an earlier date remains as a valid question, to which the answer will depend on any further archaeological and archival discoveries should they be forthcoming.

Sources of information. The absence of a structured history of Pittodrie Estate left the field wide open for the researcher willing to explore uncharted waters. A variety of 19th-century mapping and antiquarian publications gave tantalising clues; while a small collection of 18th-century family papers held at the University of Aberdeen’s Special Collections Centre (SCC) left occasional but distinct footprints on the archival trail. The above sources led ultimately to key evidence from the first half of the 17th-century, as reported below. A critical absence is the western sheet of a two-part estate plan made in 1773 by George Brown, a pupil of the noted

18th-century land surveyor Peter May. There is little doubt that this plan would have depicted the Bede House site in some detail, giving information on its layout and possibly its condition at that time.

THE GOLDEN THREAD

The bulk of this section is arranged in reverse chronological order, starting with the most recent material and tracing the core thread back through time to progressively earlier sources. As such, the process is similar to the sequence of an archaeological excavation. However, the author's archival research process was rather less systematic, and the results presented here have therefore been sorted into a suitably structured order.

It follows that the journey should start at the present day. However, in the absence of any known survival of information in the oral tradition, it is fitting to quote from A. I. McConnochie's 'Bennachie', first published in 1890, re-published by James G. Bisset Ltd. in 1985, and Scholar's Choice in 2015; and still the source of today's popular knowledge of the Bede House. The author refers (somewhat ambiguously) to

"...the foundations of the "Bede House", or houses, rather, for there are said to have been several of them, very small, each with its own little "yardie". (McConnochie, 1890, 27)

Current large-scale Ordnance Survey (OS) mapping labels the site as 'Bede House (remains of)' and depicts both the outline of the building and the boundaries of its yard, probably derived from 1973 surveying. Other than the place name and a conventional symbol, these features had been absent from successive OS editions after initially appearing on the 19th-century 1st Edition, surveyed in 1866-67, where a roofless building is shown with an associated sub-rectangular enclosure or yard (Ordnance Survey, 1868). Extensive robbing of stone for other purposes has taken place in the area, and it is probable that this has occurred both before and after the 1860s survey. The result has been progressive loss of visibility of the features, exacerbated by vegetation growth and subsequent tree-planting.

A LiDAR survey carried out in 2013 (under the auspices of the University of Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire Council and Forestry Commission Scotland) revealed the footings of the 'Bede House' and related stone dykes, more or less as depicted on the First Edition OS map. The OS has never recorded certain features to the

east of the Old Aberdeen Turnpike, which are revealed by the LiDAR survey, and which may possibly explain McConnochie's tantalising reference to the possibility of there being more than one bede house. The features in question were presumably too residual in nature to be worthy of record by the OS, even at the time of the first survey.

The record on the Canmore website gives the results of a 2002 survey by RCAHMS. Their measurements and description, while clearly the result of their own fieldwork, are consistent with the OS report of 1973 reported below. There is one significant extra detail - the mention of a trackway onto which the building's entrance-way opens (Historic Environment Scotland [HES], ?2002), a detail to which this paper will return in due course.

In 1973, as subsequently reported on the Canmore database [*ibid.*], site visits and surveys by the OS recorded a

“rectangular building ... [with] a double entrance on its E side, one on either side of a central division ... situated at the E side of a sub-rectangular enclosure ... The entrance to the enclosure is in the E, opposite to and connected to the entrance to the house”.

The core text of the entry in the Aberdeenshire Sites and Monuments Record (Aberdeenshire Council, 1997) is apparently based on the above report.

Thanks to tree-felling in the immediate vicinity, a 1973 aerial photograph (Bailies of Bennachie Archives, 1973, 12/1-85, print no. 203) shows the Bede House, its yard and traces of the ‘Robertson Highway’ (of probable 18th-century date - see below) passing the entrance.

In the absence of any known earlier 20th-century sources, it is now necessary to revisit McConnochie's account in ‘Bennachie’, which stated that the Bede House:

“...entertained four poor men, who were entitled to a peck of meal, and half-a-peck of malt each, per week, and who had to wear livery gowns, and to walk to church on Sundays before the [Pittodrie] family”.
“The last inmates were two women”. (McConnochie, 1890, 27)

No source is given for this quite detailed information. Perhaps McConnochie thought it unnecessary to reference his sources in what was essentially an in-depth guidebook for Bennachie. It does however pose an intriguing lure for the archival researcher.

McConnochie's book itself has no illustration of the Bede House, and in passing it should be noted that neither the George Washington Wilson collection

nor the Cormack archive of 19th-century local photographs contain images of the Bede House site, which might otherwise have portrayed the scene as surveyed by the OS at the time. Clearly, however, there was enough surviving stonework to justify depicting the walls of the building and related enclosure dykes on the First Edition OS mapping.

In 1878, twelve years before ‘Bennachie’ appeared, ‘Inverurie and the Earldom of the Garioch’ was published. This comprised the antiquarian researches of the Reverend John Davidson, Minister of Inverurie, and it provides several clues. Davidson states that the Erskines acquired ‘the lands of Balehagirdy’ in 1357 (Davidson, 1878, 63). He records that a ‘Hospital of Balhaggarty’ was authorised by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland (*ibid.*, 156) and was ratified by an act of the Scottish Parliament (*ibid.*, 147). Quoting from an earlier document, Davidson notes that the building consisted of, “two chambers and one mid-room” and was linked with the Chapel of the Garioch (*ibid.*, 156). Furthermore, in the 17th-century, the Erskines began to designate themselves as “of Pittodrie” (*ibid.*, 418), and “An hospital at Pittodrie” (*ibid.*, 81) is described in terms which match the above quotation from McConnochie, word for word. Davidson’s text (*ibid.*, 156) makes it clear that he interpreted the hospitals of Balhaggarty and Pittodrie to be one and the same entity.

The Name Books compiled by the OS during their preparation of the first edition mapping in the mid-19th century provide a unique record of local knowledge supporting many of the place-names on today’s maps. For ‘Bede House’, also spelled ‘Bead House’, the Name Book produced in 1865-71 (Ordnance Survey 1865-71, ref. OS1/1/70/75) states that

“Nothing but a trace of this building remains. Its date of erection is not known, but proprietors at that time having to support the poor of the district, this house was built for the Pitcaple district, and four or five men were said to have been kept in it”.

Since this data is directly linked to the feature on the OS map, any doubt about the sometime function of that specific building is more or less eliminated. The authorities for the information were Colonel H.K. Erskine (the landowner, and therefore deemed to be a reliable source) and a Mr. C. Watt. Although McConnochie refers to the latter as having been something of a local character, there is good reason to trust Watt’s testimony. The author is indebted to Alison Kennedy for information from successive census returns from 1841 to 1871 which record his name as occupant of Craigwell, a croft house adjacent to the Bede House site. The 1841 census also shows his mother, aged 86, at Craigwell, while in 1771



Bede House entrance and south chamber.

“It consists of two chambers and one mid-room”. (Spalding Club, 1843, 527)

From bottom left, the photo shows the approach pathway, the triangular threshold stone with adjacent checked and drilled stone for main door, and (left of orange peg) threshold and checked stone for door of one of the “two chambers”. The peg is in the “mid-room” space, and the north chamber is out of shot to the right. (Photo: C.H. Miller)

the Pittodrie rental estimate (SCC, 1771, 27) shows that Craigwell was tenanted by a George Watt. This strongly suggests that the Watt family lore stretched back at least to times when an occupied Bede House would have been fresh in the memory.

Prior to the arrival of the OS on the scene, a plan of the Commonty of Bennachie was prepared by Alexander Smith (Smith, 1845). The Bede House is named, and shown as being situated on Pittodrie land just outwith the Commonty boundary and in the general locality of the site in question. There is insufficient detail to determine if the building had a roof at that time.

The material revealed thus far seems to authenticate that the Bede House existed and that it was on the site depicted by the OS. However, as Davidson’s information was derived either from historic records, or from earlier compilations, it is necessary to look further back in time.

Fortunately for the progress of this research, in 1843, the Spalding Club - an Aberdeen-based antiquarian society - published Volume 1 of their 'Collections'. Therein can be found the information and, in some cases, the exact wording subsequently cited by Davidson and McConnochie in describing the Bede House, and to which one or both of those authors may well have had access. The Spalding Club description, in full, is as follows:

“There was an HOSPITAL, at Pittodrie, for four poor men, (founded under King Charles II. by William Erskin of Pittodrie,) who ought to have each one peck of meal, and half a peck of malt, weekly; to wear livery gowns, and go to the church on Sundays before the family. It consists of two chambers and one mid-room”.
(Spalding Club, 1843, 527)

There is no specific indication of the source of the information. However, the Editor's Preface (*ibid.*, xi) suggests that it was among material in the 'View of the Diocese of Aberdeen', which the Spalding Club 'printed from a manuscript in the Library of the Faculty of Advocates at Edinburgh' referenced as 'MSS. Bibl. Adv. 31. 2. 12. (Jac. V. 6. 24.)', and which forms a large proportion of the contents of Volume 1. The 'View' seems to have been an unfinished collection compiled by 'Al. Keith', a zealous presbyter of the Episcopal Church of Scotland. Although deemed to be unfinished, it is noted on the Edinburgh copy as having been completed on 25 November 1732 (though retaining missing entries within some of the parish entries). A handwritten marginal note in the SCC copy of the Spalding club volume indicates that Keith was an MA of Marischal College and the Episcopal Minister of the [Aberdeenshire] parish of Cruden.

Assuming the Bede House information to be derived as inferred above, this is something of a breakthrough - a tenable link to more than a century earlier. The Spalding text, "There was an HOSPITAL (etc.)" would appear to be of 18th-century origin, rather than from the 1840s, which suggests that it is quoted from 'View of the Diocese' and therefore implying that by 1732 the Bede House had ceased to function as such. Be that as it may, the text strongly underpins the 19th-century accounts, taking the investigation back to a time when the Bede House must have been of recent memory and some 40 years before the 1771 record of George Watt's tenancy at Craigwell.

Also in Volume 1 of the 'Collections' is an explanation of the potential confusion between the names Balhaggarty and Pittodrie – thus (*ibid.*, lxxv & 532):

“Pittodrie, the seat of Erskin of Pittodrie, descended of Sir [Thomas] Erskin of Brechin, (a cadet of Dun,) secretary to King James V. He exchanged, (very surprisingly,) the estate of Brechin with the Earl of Mar, (who is said to have been his nephew,) for that of Pittodrie, (then called the estate of Balhaggartie, ...)”

Before further excursions into the 18th-century, two early 19th-century maps enter the picture - Thomson’s ‘Atlas’ of 1832, and Robertson’s map of 1822. Thomson’s Aberdeenshire map appears to be based on the Robertson map, so it is the latter which provides the earlier depiction of a road linking Pittodrie and the Garioch with Donside (Robertson, 1822). This strategic link with Donside - termed by the present author, for convenience, the ‘Robertson Highway’ - skirts the southeastern and southern slopes of Bennachie, and must be the ‘trackway’ passing the Bede House entrance referred to in the 2002 RCAHMS survey (see also Ralston & Shepherd, this volume, figure 28). Indeed, the line of the road at this point can be traced today, both on LiDAR and as a faint profile on the ground. The road’s junction with the ‘Old Aberdeen Turnpike’ is cut by the dyke, of unknown date, bordering the west side of the Turnpike. Since the road was not shown on the 1st-edition OS map, surveyed in 1866-67, it must be assumed that by then it had ceased to be readily apparent. It may indeed have been subsumed in woodland planting by that time.

We now turn to the 18th-century when, at some date, it seems likely that the Pittodrie Bede House ceased to be used for its intended purpose. Comparisons with other similar north-east establishments are of interest. We learn that by 1732 the ‘Beidsmen’s’ house at Tarves, “... is slated, is neglected and quite waste” (Simpson, 1938, 249) while by 1735 the minister reports “the roof off, the furniture gone, and the yard misapplied” (*ibid.*). At a later date, decay must have affected the bede house at Rathven, near Buckie, which was still extant in the 19th-century and was reported in the 1840s to have been recently repaired (NSA, 268).

A fortunate archival resource is the ‘Survey and Rental’ of Pittodrie Estate, dated 1771, held at SCC (SCC, 1771). This appears to have been compiled by George Brown, land surveyor, who was responsible for the two associated plans. The document is a bound volume listing estimated rentals for each of the crofts, farms, etc. on the estate, and also including parcels not subject to rental, such as the estate woodlands. The absence of a specific record for the Bede House and its yard suggests that it was no longer a separate physical and functional entity, although the possibility that it was engrossed in the catch-all ‘houses, yards, roads’

category cannot be ruled out¹. However, there are references to ‘Beidhouse park’ and ‘the Beid’, which confirm the continuing use of the place-name at that time.

George Brown’s survey resulted in the production in 1773 of a large scale plan of the estate. This might have been expected to provide a clear snapshot of the Bede House site, whatever its state of ongoing use or abandonment, at the time of the survey. The plan comprised two sheets, one presenting the eastern half of the estate, the other the western half. Unfortunately, while the east sheet has survived and is readily accessible at SCC (SCC, 1773), the western sheet, encompassing the vicinity of the Bede House, remains elusive. References to the plan in ‘Peter May Land Surveyor’ (SHS, 1979, xxxiv) link it with work for ‘Lord Forbes at Pittodrie’, but this seems unlikely, and there is perhaps scope for confusion here. The laird of Pittodrie at the time was an Erskine, not a Forbes; while Lord Forbes himself was at ‘Putachie’ (now Castle Forbes). In passing, one might observe that ‘Putachie’ and ‘Pittodrie’ are place-names which might easily become confused. Even if the plan did find its way to Putachie, an early 19th-century fire at Castle Forbes destroyed much of the family’s archives (Shepherd, 2018). Also, Pittodrie Estate changed hands on two significant occasions after the tenure of the Erskines, with accompanying potential for dispersal or loss of records.

Despite the lack of the 1773 plan, it was possible to extend the research further back in time. The papers of the Erskine family of Pittodrie, held at SCC, include some 18th-century references of particular interest. A draft marriage contract of 1779 (SCC, 1779, 5-6) refers to

“the right of Patronage and Superiority of the Hospital of Balhaggarty, which of old was the patronage of the Chaplainries of the Chappel of Garioch, Wartle, Colliehill, Pitgavenny and Kirkinglass, now erected into the said Hospital called the Hospital of Balhaggarty by virtue of an Act of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, And Conform to Act of Parliament holden at Edinburgh the seventeenth day of November 1641 years lying within the parishes of Inverury, Raine and Bourty and Sherriffdom of Aberdeen ...”

As it is understood that Balhaggarty and Pittodrie are successive names for the same estate, it can reasonably be assumed that the ‘Hospital’ in question is the Pittodrie Bede House, despite the somewhat confusing parish references. The significance of this document is that it contains primary evidence of the founding

1 *Though, as a charitable institution maintained by the laird, it might also not have been necessarily liable to a rentable value.*

of the 'Hospital' in accordance with Acts of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland and of the Parliament of Scotland.

The text quoted above, with variations, appears earlier in the Pittodrie papers, in a 1751 Bond of Tailzie (SCC, 1751, 3-4). One may speculate that this somewhat standard description has itself been copied from earlier documents. The 1751 wording incorrectly gives the date of the act of parliament as 16th November 1641.

The 18th-century Erskine papers thus pointed a further century back in time, and perhaps to the very beginning of the story of the Bede House. The archival research therefore moved to the records of the Scottish Parliament and the General Assembly.

Thanks to the University of St Andrews, the Act of Parliament dated 17/11/1641 can readily be found on the website www.rps.ac.uk which contains the records of the Parliaments of Scotland to 1707. The following extract (RPS, 1641) from the translated version of the Act, shows that Thomas Erskine was anxious to ratify the use of funds from historic chaplainries to provide for the occupants of the Bede House:

“which whole chaplainries and lands thereto mortified had been of a long time since feued by the chaplains to the heritors for small feu duties, so that there remained but one very final duty to be paid yearly out of these whole lands, and the said Thomas as patron being most willing that the small duties yet remaining might be employed to some pious use had upon his own charges and expenses erected and built a house of two houses height at the Chapel of Garioch, of intention to put some old, poor and decrepit men therein for their better accommodation of their service to God, which intention of his could not so well be put in execution unless these small duties yet remaining of these chaplainries were a part of their provision and maintenance; and seeing the said Thomas had the right of patronage and also that there was no use for the said small duties according to their first foundation, therefore he, as patron foresaid, thought it fit to alter the said foundation and confer the same to these poor men for their better maintenance, to which he did most humbly supplicate the approbation of the foresaid general assembly so far as did concern the ecclesiastic part, and from the same assembly be represented to this present parliament, whereby the civil and legal authority might be interposed, and that the said late erected house might be called the Hospital of the Barony of Balhalgardy in all

time coming, which supplication and desire thereof being seen and considered by the said general assembly and found the same to be reasonable, they referred the same to this present parliament, as the extract of an act of the same assembly of the date at Edinburgh, 29 August 1639 foresaid, at more length bears”.

The actual structure of the building is stated above, as being ‘of two houses height’, while the original Scots text (*ibid.*) is “of tua house heichte”. It is possible to infer a subtle difference in meaning between the translated and the original Scots versions, namely, that the building was either of two storeys, or alternatively of one storey of considerable height (which could arguably include loft accommodation). Descriptions elsewhere of the building having, “two chambers and one mid-room” would be consistent with a single-storey dwelling but would imply that each chamber would be shared by two men (unless any loft accommodation was similarly divided), whereas a two storey building would presumably have four chambers. Certainly the archaeological evidence hints at there being some ‘upstairs’ accommodation, as reported elsewhere in this volume.

The text of the 1641 Act ties the ‘Hospital of the Barony of Balhagardy’ with a location ‘at the Chapel of Garioch’. As far as the author is aware there is no record of any comparable 17th-century institution at the settlement of Chapel of Garioch itself, while Pittodrie’s Bede House is at only 1.5 miles’ distance. It therefore seems reasonable to conclude that the act of parliament concerns the so-called Bede House forming the subject of this paper.

1641 is not quite the earliest involvement of the Scottish Parliament with the Bede House. On 1st October 1639, presumably as a necessary preliminary to the drafting of the Act itself, Thomas Erskine had presented a supplication to the parliamentary commission for plantation of kirks (RPS, 1639), recorded as

“Item, the reference and supplicatione presented by the Laird of Pittodrie for erectioun of the hospitall of Balhaggardie”.

The 1641 Act also records that on 29th August 1639 Thomas Erskine had secured the approval of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland for the use of chaplainry funds to establish the ‘Hospital’. This is an interesting example of the absorption of chaplainry arrangements in post-Reformation Scotland when their original purpose had ceased to be recognised. Meanwhile, for the archival researcher, the text provides a date for the assembly’s deliberation on Thomas Erskine’s proposal. Summary records of the acts of the General Assembly for 1639 have been digitised as images on the ‘Virtual Volumes’ facility at the National

Records of Scotland, but the author could find no mention of the Hospital. In the relevant document - CH 1/1/4 Register of the General Assembly at Glasgow, 1638 and Edinburgh, 1639 - what appears to be standardised secretarial terminology refers to, "A number of particular bills not needful here to be [?imperted]" (NRS, 1639, 264-5). Thus, the possible explanation of the omission is that the topic of the Hospital was of too localised a nature to be included (except, presumably, in the Minutes, which unfortunately are no longer extant (NRS, 2018). Therefore, the earliest surviving record of the Bede House may prove to be Thomas Erskine's 1639 supplication, as cited above.

BEDE HOUSE TIMELINE

Based on the above material and archaeological evidence, the following chronology can be compiled:

1639 (29 August): Hospital of the Barony of Balhagardy (i.e. the Bede House) "erected" by virtue of an Act of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland.

1639 (1 October): Thomas Erskine submits a supplication to a parliamentary commission regarding the 'Hospital'.

1639-1641? Assumed date of construction of 'Hospital' by Thomas Erskine.

1641 (17 November): Parliament of Scotland ratifies Erskine's use of former chaplainry revenue for maintenance of occupants of Bede House.

18th-century? Bede House, or at least its use for its original purpose, likely to have become defunct (based on absence of specific entry in 1771 estate record). However, the 1779 draft marriage contract (*op. cit.*) notes that the Erskines retain "the right of Patronage and Superiority of the Hospital of Balhaggarty".

18th-19th century: Robbing of stonework from house and dykes.

Late 19th-century - early 20th-century: Tree planting in yard.

20th-century (?c1970): Felling of above timber crop.

20th-century (?1970s): Tree planting in yard and building.

2018: Archaeological excavation (partial) of Bede House and yard dykes.

2019: At the time of writing, tree felling in yard and building is scheduled for spring 2019, and will be subject to protection of archaeological features.

THE QUEST

It is never possible to be completely methodical when conducting archival research. A brutalist approach might restrict itself to the relentless use of search engines, to the detriment of any kind of enjoyment to be derived from the quest. The author is not entirely embarrassed to admit to a somewhat haphazard process of exploration in such directions as happened to present themselves. As one proceeds on such a course, shortcomings in the process and gaps in the results tend to make their presence known. Unexpected sources appear, and the research leads off into new directions. That the results in this case cohere into something of a history of the Bede House is fortunate, and owes much to debate with other members of the archaeology team, assisted by a goodly measure of luck.

Some of the pitfalls and rewards experienced during the research are recounted here, in the same sequence as 'The Golden Thread' above, in the hope that this will be of benefit to other researchers. An over-arching feature is the wide-ranging availability of data online, enabling information to be rapidly acquired and compared.

McConnochie's 'Bennachie' provides the most accessible account. It was rewarding to trace the author's text back to previous sources, but frustrating that no source was provided or discovered for his references to the last occupants being two women and to there having been several bede houses (McConnochie, *op.cit.*). One may surmise that these came from oral tradition which has since been lost with the passage of time. On a positive note, census information, the OS Name Book and estate papers (the 1771 Pittodrie rental volume), proved invaluable in cross-referencing with McConnochie's reference to Charles Watt.

Davidson's 'Inverurie and the Earldom of the Garioch' revealed the origins of the Bede House by linking its founding (as the 'Hospital of Balhaggarty') with deliberations in the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland and the Parliament of Scotland. Notably, however, Davidson erroneously gave the year of the act of parliament as 1651 when in fact it was 1641. Ironically, this particular detail sent this researcher back to check the material on www.rps.ac.uk. Of the two Erskine family papers, the 1779 draft marriage contract gives the date as 17th November 1641, while the 1751 bond of tailzie gives it as 16th November 1641. Naturally, one would assume that the earlier document would be the correct version, and indeed on browsing the rps website an act of 16/11/1641 was found which implied that any obligations formerly imposed by the (excommunicated Roman Catholic) bishops would continue but under the aegis of the monarchy. Assuming that such

obligations might include those pertaining to bede houses, the author accepted this somewhat disappointing result, until the fortunate discovery of Davidson's error and the discovery of the Hospital of Balhalgardy act of parliament with its correct date of 17/11/1641. It must be admitted that a search on the RPS site using the term 'Pittodrie' would have instantly revealed not only the act of parliament, but also Thomas Erskine's supplication to the Scottish Parliament of 1639 which had not been mentioned in other sources.

The Spalding Club 'Collections' published in 1843 provided much the same information as Davidson's subsequent work, but with the rewarding note that the information could have been originally set down in 1732 - thus affording the researcher a great leap further back in time, although with the minor aberration that the founding of the 'Hospital' is credited to William Erskine, rather than Thomas, which contradicts the 17th-century parliamentary records.

Finally, one must record the intervention of Sod's Law in that the all-important western sheet of the 1773 Pittodrie estate plan appears to be missing - if only in the hope that somewhere, sometime it will turn up!

ARCHIVES AND ARCHAEOLOGY

As a participant in the 2018 dig, the author was able to observe instances where the archival information informed the field excavation and vice versa. Notably, the documentary sources seem to confirm that the building under excavation was indeed the Bede House. Practical examples include the references to the internal ground plan, the possibility of a two-storey (or tall) structure, and the map evidence for the 'Robertson Highway' all of which are reflected in archaeological observations on the site. This synchrony stimulated ongoing discussion and questioning which benefitted both processes and generally assisted in maintaining team spirit.

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