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Designations: Scheduled Monument (SM90116), Listed Buildings (LB25963; LB46894; LB25965; LB46895; LB25960; LB46893)

Taken into State care: 1904 (Ownership)

Last reviewed: 2011

**HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT SCOTLAND
STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

DUNFERMLINE ABBEY, PALACE AND NAVE



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.

DUNFERMLINE ABBEY, PALACE AND NAVE

SYNOPSIS

Dunfermline Abbey was founded as a priory during the reign of Malcolm III (1058-93) and his queen, Margaret (c.1070-93), when Benedictine monks from Canterbury established what was the first community in Scotland organised on the Continental Benedictine model. Their youngest son, David I (1124-53), revitalised the monastery, rebuilding it anew and confirming its role as royal mausoleum; King Robert Bruce was laid to rest there in 1329. The abbey guest house served as a royal residence, and was greatly remodelled for James V in the 1530s. Following the Protestant Reformation (1560), the abbey nave continued in use as the burgh's parish church, whilst the east end was allowed to fall into ruin. In the 1590s, the area to the west of the abandoned cloister was transformed into a residence for James VI's queen, Anna; Charles I was born there in 1600. Following the Union of the Crowns (1603), the palace too fell into disuse. By 1800, the abbey nave had become structurally unsound, and in 1821 a new parish church, built over the site of the abbey choir, was opened. Shortly thereafter, the state assumed responsibility for the nave and cloister, including what was left of the royal palace to the SW.

The property in care comprises: the abbey nave (essentially 12th century) with the footings of the previous church beneath its floor; the ruined 13th-century St Margaret's Chapel east of the 19th-century parish church, built to house the canonised queen's shrine; the fragmentary remains of the abbey cloister, including the monumentally impressive 14th-century refectory with its undercroft, the Pends gatehouse and kitchens; the 13th/14th-century guest house transformed into a royal palace in the mid 16th century; and a fragment of the Nether Yett (South Port), 250m south-east of the abbey. The Abbey Church of Dunfermline is the responsibility of the Church of Scotland.

CHARACTER OF THE MONUMENT

Historical Overview:

Monastic period

- c.1070 - Malcolm III and Margaret are married in Dunfermline. The pious queen has a new Church of the Holy Trinity built, and invites a small community of Benedictine monks from Canterbury to settle there. This is the first community in Scotland of monks organised on the Continental Benedictine model.
- 1093 - Malcolm and Margaret die. Margaret is buried in the new church, whilst Malcolm is laid to rest in Tynemouth Priory. During the civil war that follows their deaths, the monks return to England.
- c. 1100 - King Edgar (1097-1107) seeks to re-establish the Benedictine community. He extends his parent's church, and is also buried there.
- 1107x1124 - Alexander I has Malcolm's body translated from Tynemouth to Dunfermline. Alexander is also buried in Dunfermline in 1124.
- 1128 - David I (1124-53) elevates the church to abbey status, invites more Benedictines from Canterbury to staff it, and orders its complete rebuilding on a truly grand scale. As the burial place of his parents, his intention is evidently to

confirm the church's role as the royal mausoleum, and the scale of the new church, on a par with Durham Cathedral, reflects this.

- 1150 - the abbey church is dedicated. The choir, transepts and nave aisles are probably largely completed by this time.
- 1153 - David I is buried in Dunfermline.
- 1165 - David I's grandson, Malcolm IV, is buried in Dunfermline.
- 1180 - Queen Margaret's remains are translated to a new location on the north side of the high altar.
- 1249 - Margaret is canonised by Pope Innocent IV. In 1250, her body is translated to a new shrine chapel at the east end of the church.
- 1286 - Alexander III is buried in Dunfermline.
- 1303 - Edward I of England makes the abbey his winter campaign headquarters during the Wars of Independence, and causes much damage to the domestic buildings.
- 1324 – David II (1329-71) is born in Dunfermline.
- 1329 – King Robert Bruce (1306-29) contributes to the rebuilding of the abbey complex, then well underway. That same year he dies and his body (minus his heart which is taken on crusade and thereafter buried in **Melrose Abbey** in 1331) is buried in the choir, the last sovereign to be buried in Dunfermline.
- 14th century - rebuilding of the domestic buildings continues, including the monumental refectory, guest house and Pends gatehouse.
- 1394 - James I (1406-37) is born at Dunfermline.
- 1420 - Robert, duke of Albany, the governor, is buried in Dunfermline
- 1444x68 - Abbot Richard de Bothwell rebuilds the NW part of the nave, and adds a NW tower and north porch. The so-called Abbot House, to the north of the church and within the abbey precinct, is also built around now.

Post-Reformation

- 1559/60 - the Protestant Reformation sees the church soon stripped of its Catholic furnishings and the domestic buildings ransacked. (St Margaret's relics are smuggled out of the country and end up at the Escorial, Spain, where they are later lost.) The nave continues in use as the burgh's parish church but by 1563 the choir is roofless.
- 1587 - the Act of Annexation brings Dunfermline Abbey directly under Crown control. In 1589 James VI (1567-1625) gives the abbey to his queen, Anna of Denmark, who instructs William Schaw, master of works, to build her a new residence (the Queen's House) west of the abbey.
- 1596 - Queen Anna's eldest daughter, Elizabeth of Bohemia, 'the Winter Queen', is born at Dunfermline.
- 1600 - Queen Anna's second son, Charles I, is born at Dunfermline.
- 1602 - Queen Anna's third son, Robert, is born at Dunfermline but dies months later and is buried in the church - the last member of Scotland's royal family to be buried there.
- 1603 - James VI moves his court to London following the Union of the Crowns. Two years later, Queen Anna leaves Dunfermline to join him. The royal residence is left to decay.
- 1624 - the great fire of Dunfermline destroys almost everything in the town but Abbot House.

- 17th century - the former abbey nave is gradually fitted out for Presbyterian worship, including the insertion of two levels of timber galleries in the aisles and lowering the nave ceiling (all removed during the 19th century). Structural works include the rows of flying buttresses added along the side walls (1620 and 1625) to provide additional support, whilst the outer walls of the galleries are lowered and the roofs rebuilt to a steeper pitch.
- 1672 - part of the choir is blown down.
- 1718 - Dunfermline's first damask weaving loom is set up in the Pends gatehouse.
- 1726 - the east gable crumbles.
- 1753 - the central tower collapses.
- 1787 - Robert Burns visits and kisses a gravestone reputed to be that of King Robert Bruce. By then, the ruined choir is serving as a burial ground called 'Psalter Churchyard'. The first fragments from an alabaster tomb, later believed to be from Bruce's grave, are found.
- 1797 - the Queen's House is demolished.
- 1807 - the SW tower is brought down during a storm.
- 1818/19 - work begins on a new parish church, built over the site of the old choir and transepts, to designs by William Burn. Mortal remains, widely believed to be those of King Robert Bruce, and fragments of his fine alabaster tomb are discovered.
- 1821 - the new Abbey Church of Dunfermline is officially opened on St Andrew's Day (30 November). Plans to restore the nave are dropped.
- 1832 - 158 cholera victims are buried in the cloister garth.
- 1840s - the nave and cloister are entrusted into state care. A programme of repair ensues.
- 1873/82 – stained-glass windows by James Ballantine are installed in the nave.
- 1895 - a museum is created in Pends gatehouse.
- 1916 - foundations of the late 11th-century church are discovered beneath the nave floor.
- 1935 - the first peal of bells is installed in the nave's NW tower, to mark the centenary of the birth of Andrew Carnegie, Dunfermline's greatest son.
- 1974 - The Pends is closed to vehicular traffic.
- 1993 - Dunfermline Abbey figures prominently in celebrations to mark the 900th anniversary of St Margaret's death.
- 1994 - Abbot House (not in state care) is opened as a heritage centre, currently (2017) closed.
- 2003 - The 'Royal Dunfermline' conference takes place in Dunfermline, to mark the 400th anniversary of the Union of the Crowns.

Archaeological Overview:

The monastic walled precinct was extensive (c. 22 acres (9ha)), enclosing an area roughly corresponding to Maygate, Canmore Street, New Row, Priory Lane, Monastery Street and St Catherine's Wynd. Only a small part, centred on the church and cloister to the south and west, is in state care. This wider monastic precinct is likely to be rich in buried archaeological deposits, which when excavated could add substantially to our understanding of the historical

development of one of Scotland's greatest monastic institutions. Despite the subsequent extensive use of much of this area as a burial ground, its archaeological potential must be considerable, as the results of excavations south of Abbot House demonstrate. Not only could there be important archaeological evidence surviving for the cloister and surrounding structures (eg, the infirmary and fish ponds to the east of the cloister), but also for Queen Anna's residence to the west of the abbey, and for the West Port, the outermost main gate into the monastery precinct, to the NW of the church.

Abbey Church

- There have been extensive archaeological investigations within various parts of the abbey complex, but most were carried out in an age when techniques were inadequate to establish more than wall lines or to locate obvious burials.
- Excavations associated with the construction of the new parish church in 1818-21 found some evidence for the layout of the 12th-century choir, transepts and presbytery, though descriptions of what was found make clear there was no systematic attempt to establish the plan.
- Excavations in the nave in 1849, whilst laying a new pavement, encountered burials.
- In 1916 the interior of the nave was investigated by Peter Macgregor Chalmers, who located the foundations of the earlier church. However, his conclusions must be viewed with caution. The fact that Chalmers found so few burials in 1916 suggests he did not excavate much below the level of the footings he was seeking, which makes it likely that much remains still to be discovered about the nature of the early church.
- In 1977 excavations in the south nave aisle, prompted by ground settlement, found an earlier wall.

Monastic Buildings

- In 1920-24 the refectory in the south range and the southern end of the east range were excavated. Prior to then the ground level within them had been at the level of the cloister, and nothing was known of the lower storeys apart from their outer (south) elevations. It is probable that excavation stopped once medieval occupation levels were reached, and here again much evidence probably remains untouched.
- In 1974-5 excavations were carried out around the Pends gatehouse following its closure to vehicular traffic and in advance of landscaping.
- In 1988 excavations at Canmore's Tower, overlooking Tower Burn west of the abbey, revealed that the structure was 14th century, and not 11th century as had previously been thought.
- In 1992 excavations in and around Abbot House, Maygate, discovered, amongst other things, part of the monastic precinct wall. Abbot House was dated to the later 1400s.

Architectural/Artistic Overview:

The 11th-century church

- The first known phase of the original abbey church, consisting of two compartments, was probably built by Margaret soon after 1070, and, although

there can be no certainty on this, it was perhaps there that she and King Malcolm were first buried. It comprised a small, square western nave, possibly with a tower above given the thickness of the wall footings, and a larger, rectangular chancel to the east for the monks.

- The second phase, consisting of a third, much longer, rectangular compartment and perhaps an east apse, may represent work by King Edgar, who re-introduced more monks from Canterbury c.1100.

The 12th-century church

- The eastern parts of the church built by David I after 1128 have been lost, but they appear to have consisted of a choir of four bays, probably with three apses at the east end, and transepts projecting one bay on each side, possibly with east chapel apses.
- The surviving nave is of eight bays. There were originally three towers, one over the crossing to the east and the others over the westernmost bays. The internal design was of three storeys: arcades carried on cylindrical piers; galleries with a windowed outer wall; and a clearstorey at the top.
- The detailing of the first phase of work was highly enriched, with incised decoration to some of the piers, doorways of multiple orders with finely carved capitals, decorative wall arcading in the aisles, nook shafts framing window openings, and much chevron- and label-moulding. The chevron-decorated nave piers at the nave's east end would have highlighted the presence there of the nave's main altar.
- All of this shows debts to work at Waltham and Selby abbeys, but mostly to Durham Cathedral (also Benedictine), from where the first masons were probably brought. Early illustrations of the church suggest that in the transepts and missing east nave bay, the openings of the gallery were subdivided by four sub-arches.
- However, the upper storeys of the rest of the nave were finished more simply, to a design closer to that at Carlisle Cathedral, suggesting that funds were tighter after David I's death in 1153.
- Considered within its Scottish architectural context, and despite the modifications it has undergone, the nave is the most complete example of a major Romanesque building in Scotland. (Although there is more apparently Romanesque work at Kirkwall Cathedral, a building heavily influenced by Dunfermline, much that is seen there is in fact a later medieval continuation of the original design.) The essentially Durham-inspired work at Dunfermline illustrates the dependence of Scottish patrons on Anglo-Norman craftsmen at the start of the great period of renewal in the Church in the early 1100s, at a time when there were few Scots craftsmen of sufficient calibre.
- The east end of the church was extended in the 1230s and 40s, the work culminating in a square ambulatory leading to a feretory chapel housing the shrine of St Margaret. The chapel's fragmentary remains show that it had decorative wall arcading at the lower level, and single shafts to support the vaulting. This extension suggests that the abbey was again in a period of high confidence, and attempting to maximise the benefits to be derived from its principal asset, the relics of St Margaret. (The existing two marble plinth blocks of the shrine base are probably those purchased in London in 1368.)
- The choir and presbytery were probably re-ordered as part of the same operation. The remains of the rood screen in the east bay of the nave are

perhaps of this date; the pulpitum is known to have been one bay further east, in the west arch of the crossing. A five-bay Lady Chapel, built on the north side of the choir in the 1300s, was demolished in 1818.

- Works carried out for Abbot Richard de Bothwell (1444-68) saw the NW nave bays entirely rebuilt, together with the NW tower and a fine north porch. Some windows were enlarged and provided with tracery around the same time. By 1500 the nave had several side altars, including one dedicated to the Rood and Our Lady at the east end of the north aisle. The ceiling of this end bay is decorated with a fine painting showing SS Peter, Andrew and Paul c. 1500.
- Post-Reformation, a royal vault was built against the nave's south wall to receive Queen Anna's body; in the event she was buried in London, and in 1616 the vault was passed to the Wardlaws of Pitreavie. Flying buttresses were added along the nave's north (1620) and south (1625) walls to provide additional support. The outer walls of the galleries were lowered and the roofs rebuilt to a steeper pitch. Subsequently, two levels of timber lofts were inserted within the aisles, and a lowered ceiling placed over the nave above the level of the nave arcades.
- In the 1870s, an important group of stained-glass windows, created by James Ballantine (whose best work can be seen in St Giles, Edinburgh), was installed in the nave. The splendid great west window, showing portraits of Margaret and Malcolm, Wallace and Bruce, designed by Noel Paton, was placed there in 1882.

Monastic Buildings

East Range

- The east range undercroft and its associated reredorter, revealed in the 1920s, contains the earliest evidence yet found of the monastic buildings. The lancet windows and the remains of vaulting with octapartite intersections along the walls point to high-quality craftsmanship of the later 1200s.

South Range

- The refectory, the most impressive structure, was built after the 1303 destruction. The south elevation is outstandingly impressive, the sloping nature of the site requiring two levels of vaulted substructures to raise the refectory to cloister level. The refectory hall has traceried windows throughout: a large window to the dais, smaller paired windows to the pulpit, which is projected out southward on a multi-cusped arch, and a sequence of uniform windows to the main body. Most impressive of all is the seven-light west window, combining reticulation and 'spherical' tracery and which seems to culminate in the initial 'M' – for Margaret perhaps?
- King Robert's financial support for the refectory's reconstruction may have been to help demonstrate his kingdom's new-found confidence. The difficulties of the sloping site were turned to advantage by creating a soaring structure with an outer façade that can have had few equals elsewhere in the British Isles.
- Interestingly, although the repertoire of architectural forms is still drawn largely from current English fashions, the slightly gauche detailing of the impressive west window suggests that Scots masons were beginning to lose touch, for

whatever reason, with what was happening south of the Border and were seeking new exemplars.

- In the lower of the refectory's two undercrofts, along the north wall, are incised lines in the masonry that may be connected to the master mason's setting out and construction of the vaults above. (**Torphichen Preceptory** has similar markings.)

Gatehouse

- Pends gate, immediately west of the refectory, was one of at least three entrances into the monastic precinct. The main entrance into the outer precinct, the West Port to the NW of the abbey church, no longer exists. Fragments of a service gate, the Nether Yett, remain in St Margaret Street (also in state care). Pends gate was the main entrance between the outer and inner precincts.
- The Pends gatehouse probably dates in its present form to c.1400. It had two gates, one for wheeled traffic, the other for pedestrians. The two upper floors provided three chambers, two vaulted, odd-shaped rooms on the first floor, the top floor one quadripartite-vaulted, well-lit chamber with a fine fireplace, perhaps for use either by the cellarer or almoner. The gatehouse has corridors, carried on arched projections across the face of the refectory, that provided service access from kitchens to refectory.

Guest house/palace

- The guest house, running west from the gatehouse, possibly served from the outset as a royal residence. Of the four royal residences built in Scotland's monasteries (the others were at **Holyrood Abbey**, Scone Abbey and the Dominican friary, Perth), Dunfermline's is the only one to have survived.
- The guest house seems to have been rebuilt after the 1303 destruction. It was remodelled to provide a spacious hall above a quadripartite-vaulted undercroft, which, in view of its fireplace, may also have functioned as a lower (common) hall. A kitchen was built to its east, which also served the refectory.
- The guest house was substantially remodelled, probably for James V in the later 1530s. The works involved replacing the original vaults by transverse barrel vaults, adding the external (south) buttresses, and adding a third storey. The fine mullioned and transomed windows in the surviving (south) elevation, replacing the earlier arched windows, date from this time. From the three-sided oratory-oriel atop the heightened hall came the Annunciation Stone now in the stone display; it bears the arms of Abbot George Durie (c.1530x60).
- At the west end of the guest house is a complicated structure, interpreted as part of the royal lodgings, that formerly continued northward (the old 'west quarter').

Social Overview:

- The chief personal associations of Dunfermline are with the MacMalcolm and Bruce dynasties, and in particular St Margaret, David I and King Robert the Bruce (the latter's name is boldly proclaimed in the stone parapet of the Abbey Church). The 12th-century abbey nave is associated with the 19th-century Abbey Church to its east both physically and spatially, acting as a kind of powerful vestibule. The cloister, burial ground and well-tended gardens are popular recreational spaces, and the entire abbey complex is the centrepiece

of Dunfermline's historic core – now dubbed the 'Heritage Quarter' – and visible from miles around.

- For local people, the abbey remains a source of great pride. Valuable support for local interests is provided by the Carnegie Dunfermline Trust which, amongst other activities, funds well-informed tour guides who invariably include the abbey in their itinerary. In the early 1990s the Trust helped fund visitor improvements, including the creation of the carved stone display in the Pends gatehouse.
- Dunfermline Palace and abbey is primarily a tourist location. It is popular with schools, and groups of dressed-up children are frequently in evidence. The abbey grounds are a favourite lunch-time sitting-out area for local workers.

Spiritual Overview:

- Dunfermline was the first foundation for the Benedictine order in Scotland, and marks the introduction of monasticism on the European pattern into the Scottish kingdom.
- Dunfermline in medieval times was intimately associated with Scotland's royal saint, St Margaret, and a focus for pilgrims en route to the shrine of St Andrew in St Andrews.
- David I, who was buried in Dunfermline and also widely regarded as a saint, was the driving force behind the wholesale reorganisation of the Scottish Church in the 12th century. The royal mausoleum he created at Dunfermline invites comparison with that at Saint-Denis, Paris (rebuilt contemporaneously) and Henry III's Westminster Abbey, which likewise is associated with the cult of a royal saint.
- The abbey nave was the principal place of worship for the townspeople from the early 1100s until the Abbey Church was opened in 1821.
- Today, the abbey nave retains its spirituality and aura of sanctity. Whilst serving as a vestibule for the 19th-century parish church, it is also distinct from it, thanks to the difference in temperature, lighting, arrangement and feel.
- The abbey nave remains in constant spiritual use as a vestibule for the Abbey Church including as a processional space for weddings and funerals. It is used by visitors for private prayer and contemplation. It also remains a place of pilgrimage, including the annual St Margaret's pilgrimage.

Aesthetic Overview

- The abbey church (medieval and 19th century), refectory and guest house/palace are monumentally impressive structures externally, making full use of the sloping ground to accentuate their mass and verticality.
- The nave is a very moving space, the solid piers and dark interior emphasising its verticality and heaviness. There is a sense of changed worlds between exterior and interior, largely due to the visual and aural dissonance between the areas (urban noise and light outside, stillness and darkness within). The nave is also very different from the Abbey Church, which is all whitewash and light.
- The refectory undercroft has a ghostly peace about it, aided by the towering height of the cloister way above and the quietness of the pedestrianised Monastery Street beyond its south wall.

- The property is close to the centre of Dunfermline, but is located off the main roads and so very peaceful. The presence nearby of other museums and heritage places simply adds to the sense of history that the abbey and palace retain.
- There are fine views of the abbey from many points, the grouping of the church's three towers being prominent in most vistas of the town. However, it is the view from the SW, from Pittencrieff Park (known locally as 'The Glen') across the Tower Burn, that is the most outstanding; indeed, it is the most dramatic prospect of any monastic complex in Scotland, and deserves to be far more widely appreciated than it is. The manner in which the layers of building develop around the slope on which the abbey is set, with the palace block at the lowest level, the refectory behind and to one side, and the abbey church itself as the climax at the highest point, is extraordinarily impressive. Variations on this view have been drawn by many artists down the centuries.
- The abbey and palace complex is hugged by trees, particularly on the SW side. Whilst providing a most attractive green fringe, the continuing growth of the trees is now making it increasingly difficult to appreciate the view from Pittencrieff Park.

What are the major gaps in understanding of the property?

- Although the remains of the abbey are unusually extensive, and the individual parts more complete than is usually the case, there are nevertheless huge gaps in our knowledge. We know very little about:
 - (i) the 12th-century church's eastern parts (choir, transepts and presbytery);
 - (ii) the east range, and in particular its chapter house;
 - (iii) the cloister and west range;
 - (iv) the royal palace complex built for Queen Anna c.1590 to the west and SW of the abbey church;
 - (v) the wider monastic precinct to the east of the abbey church.
- There is a need for a modern synthesis of the documentation associated with the abbey.

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Key Points:

- Dunfermline Abbey was the first Benedictine community in Scotland, marking a watershed in the 'Europeanisation' of the medieval Scottish Church.
- Though only the nave of the 12th-century church survives, it remains the largest and most complete Romanesque church surviving in Scotland.
- Dunfermline Abbey was home to the cult of St Margaret, Scotland's royal saint.
- Dunfermline Abbey was the principal royal mausoleum from the later 11th to the 14th century.
- The property in care comprises one of the most extensive medieval monastic complexes left standing in Scotland.
- The palace is the only surviving royal guest house of the four built at religious houses.
- Aesthetically, Dunfermline Abbey and Palace are among the most visually impressive medieval monastic complexes surviving in Britain.

- As the final resting place of King Robert the Bruce, Dunfermline continues to have a special place in the national consciousness.

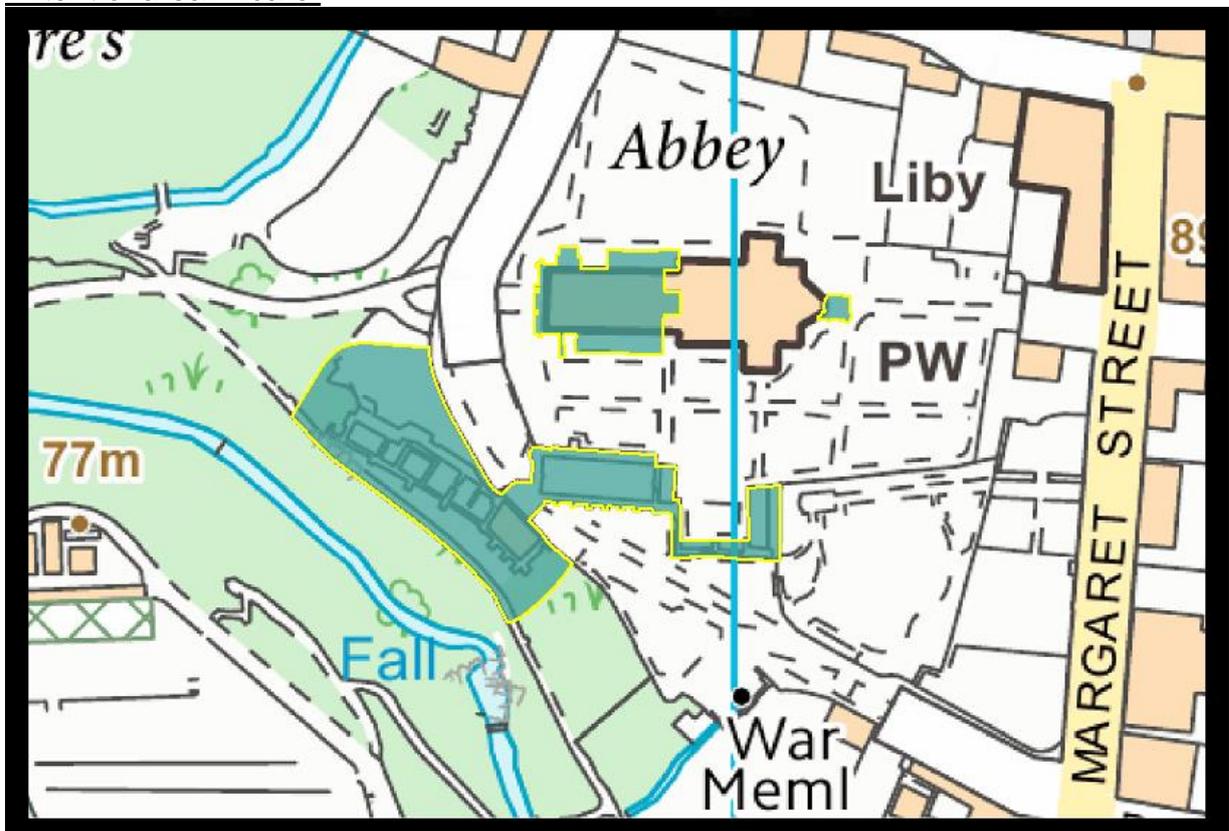
Associated Properties

(other related local sites) - Abbot House; St Margaret's Cave, Canmore's Tower.
(other Benedictine foundations in Scotland): Coldingham Priory, **Iona Abbey** and **Nunnery**, Isle of May Priory, Urquhart Priory (Moray).
(other related Romanesque architecture) - Durham Cathedral, Waltham Abbey, Selby Abbey, Carlisle Cathedral, **Edrom Norman Doorway**; **Jedburgh Abbey**, **Kelso Abbey**, Kirkwall Cathedral, Dalmeny Church, Leuchars Church, **St Margaret's Chapel (Edinburgh Castle)**; Tynninghame Church.
(other Scottish royal burial places) – **Arbroath Abbey** (William I), **Cambuskenneth Abbey** (James III), **Holyrood Abbey** (David II, James II, James V) **Iona** (Macbeth, Lulach etc), **Melrose Abbey** (Alexander II), Paisley Abbey (Robert III), Perth, Carthusian Priory (James I) and Scone Abbey (Robert II).
(other European royal mausolea) - Westminster Abbey, London; Saint-Denis Abbey, Paris.

Keywords:

Romanesque, abbey, cloister, shrine, royal mausoleum, St Margaret, David I, Robert Bruce, refectory, guest house, palace.

Extent of area in care:



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