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ENVIRONMENT
SCOTLAND

ÀRAINNEACHD
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ALBA

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Designations:	Scheduled Monument (SM90040)
Taken into State care:	1912 (Ownership)
Last reviewed:	2005

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

BRECHIN MAISON DIEU CHAPEL



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This statement is based on a rapid survey of existing, accessible information. It is not intended to be a definitive assessment and should not be used as such.

BRECHIN MAISON DIEU CHAPEL

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

All that remains visible of the chapel of the Maison Dieu hospital in Brechin is part of the south wall and the part of the east wall embedded in the neighbouring building. The chapel was built in the 13th Century to serve a hospital serving the poor.

CHARACTER OF THE MONUMENT

Historical Overview

- The Maison Dieu hospital was founded by William de Brechin between 1261 and 1267, at a time when the founding of monasteries was becoming less popular. The hospital, or almshouse, was established to serve the poor and the founding charter refers to St Mary's Chapel which appears to have been built at this time.
- In 1572 the hospital was transferred to the burgh authorities. The bedesmen, pensioners who prayed for the soul of the benefactor, are still referred to in 1582.
- In 1636 the post of precentor was merged with that of the school master at the burgh grammar school and the title was still used into the 18th Century.
- By the early 19th Century the chapel had been partly demolished and was being used as a stable.

Archaeological Overview

- There has been no archaeological investigation of the site.
- Early 19th-century maps show the chapel backing onto open ground. While the hospital will have consisted of other buildings in addition to the chapel, their location is not known.

Artistic/Architectural Overview

- The south wall of the chapel retains three lancet windows and a heavily moulded doorway. A string course forms the sill of the windows and becomes the outer moulding of the arch of the door. The east gable of the church, containing a blocked window, is shared with the neighbouring house.
- While the building is modest in scale the windows and door all exhibit considerable care and elaboration in their mouldings.
- The interior of the chapel retains its piscina which incorporates a stone credence shelf within the arched recess.

Social Overview

- No formal assessment of this has been carried out.
- The monument stands in a residential area and has given its name to the street on which it stands and the neighbouring primary school, which may be able to trace its descent from the original hospital.

Spiritual Overview

- The origins of the monument as a chapel for the hospital lends the remains some spiritual significance but the site does not appear to have been used for worship for over 300 years.

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Aesthetic Overview

- The remains of the Maison Dieu chapel stand in a residential area which presents a modern urban setting to the monument.
- While the building's architectural features are evident, the way in which the fairly narrow pavement abuts the building and the crowding of adjacent boundaries to the North, leave the building appearing hemmed in.

What are the major gaps in understanding of the property?

- The detailed history of the monument has not been traced.
- The chapel formed part of the large complex of the hospital and the arrangement of these other building has not been traced.

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Key points

- The remains of the chapel are a good, if fragmentary, example of church building from the third quarter of the 13th Century.
- The Maison Dieu is an example of the type of small ecclesiastical establishment which became increasingly popular with founders through the 13th Century. The Maison Dieu is a rare example of the survival of one of these establishments in an urban context.
- The building is a feature of interest that reinforces Brechin's importance as a medieval religious centre.

Associated Properties

Torphichen Preceptory. Kincardine O'Neil old church and hospital

Keywords hospital almshouse chapel piscina