



*Highland Archaeology Services Ltd*

## Fort Augustus Abbey



## Photographic Survey

### Part 6: The Cloisters, South Range, Abbey Church and Grounds

Report No. HAS 050303

Client	Raven Highlands Ltd
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## Background

The Abbey site consists of a complex of buildings of different dates built on the site of a former 18<sup>th</sup> century Fort, together with the grounds which occupy an area bounded by the Caledonian Canal, Loch Ness, the River Tarff, and the road. The fort in turn replaced an earlier castle on the same site. It is a very complex building that demonstrates effective adaptation and re-use over more than 250 years. That process is now continuing as it takes on a new life as luxury accommodation.

Fort Augustus was built between 1724 and 1742 by General Wade and named in honour of the Duke of Cumberland, who later set up his headquarters here after the battle of Culloden. However its military importance later declined and the site was sold by the government to Thomas, Lord Lovat in 1867, whose son Simon granted it in 1876 to the (Roman Catholic) English congregation of Benedictines for an abbey. The abbey opened on 16 October 1878, and the Guest House, School and Monastery buildings were completed by 1880. The Abbey School closed in 1894, but reopened in 1920. It became a key part of the life of the monastery until it closed in the mid 1990s. The Abbey itself followed suit in 2000. The buildings, already in poor condition, then deteriorated badly. The present conversion of the Abbey to luxury flats is intended to give them a sustainable future. The Abbey is Listed Grade A and recorded on the Highland Sites and Monuments Record and the National Monuments Record for Scotland (NMRS and HSMR No. NH30NE0006).

## *The Cloisters*

The Cloisters were one of the earliest features of the Abbey to be built, by the original architect Joseph A. Hansom in 1876-80, and they make use of the pre-existing Barrack Square.



Figure 2 The Cloisters, looking NW



### ***The South Range***

This includes the sacristy (originally built as a scriptorium), chapter house, the intended sacristy (later a store), and connecting corridors between the Abbey church and the monastery. These Victorian buildings were started in 1890, following an ambitious scheme designed by the architect P.P.Pugin. The corridor linking the sacristy and the church along the west side of the chapter house was built in 1914. They stand on the site of the earlier Governor's house, which was demolished circa 1876-1880. No evidence of this is now visible above ground, but it seems likely that there may be buried evidence of former basements here. This also appears to be the focus of the former castle that preceded the Hanoverian Fort. These issues should be considered in the event of any future proposed ground disturbance in this part of the site.

### ***The Abbey Church***

The abbey church was also begun in 1890, on the site of the two southern fort bastions. Substantial mass concrete foundations were laid and vaults were built on the south side of the church, which slopes away steeply, to support side chapels and a tall tower intended to stand over the south transept. However three years later work stopped through lack of funds with only St Andrew's chapel usable for worship. The vaults are used for heating systems and storage. The Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament and the Choir were built over these between 1914 and 1917. The nave was built between 1949 and 1956, on Pugin's foundations. A tunnel underneath was constructed to join a planned connecting passage leading south from the west cloister, which was however never built. The narthex, baptistery and porch on the east were added in 1966. Finally in 1980 the eastern apse, floor and fittings were added, and the half-finished intended sacristy, of 1898 was finally completed - to a modern design. The church was consecrated on 11 July 1981.

Much of the upstanding fabric of the abbey church seems to be of mass concrete, faced with stone or plastered.



**Figure 3 Cricket Pavilion**

## *The Grounds*

The main emphasis of this photographic survey has been the buildings of the abbey complex itself. However the opportunity has been taken to include a number of features in the grounds. The harbour for example originated as a feature of the 18<sup>th</sup> century fort, with a boathouse added in the early 20<sup>th</sup> c. This boathouse is intended to be significantly altered and upgraded as part of the present proposals. South of the abbey church are various buildings associated with gardening, chicken-keeping and maintenance. In the north-east corner of the site is the swimming pool, built 1933-5. In the north-west corner is the cricket pavilion, now in very poor condition.

## **Photographic record**

Site familiarisation and risk assessment was done on 27 July 2004. Some photography took place immediately afterwards, during observation of the engineering test pits (see Report 0481) with further work in the autumn of 2004 and January to May 2005. Every room has been photographed at least once, but camera issues and problems of very low light in some areas caused problems, and large parts of the survey had to be re-done. This has meant the whole has taken significantly longer to complete than expected. Each part of the survey consists of a report and one or more CDROMs containing a full set of images for that section. **Only a small illustrative selection of photographs has been included in the report itself.**

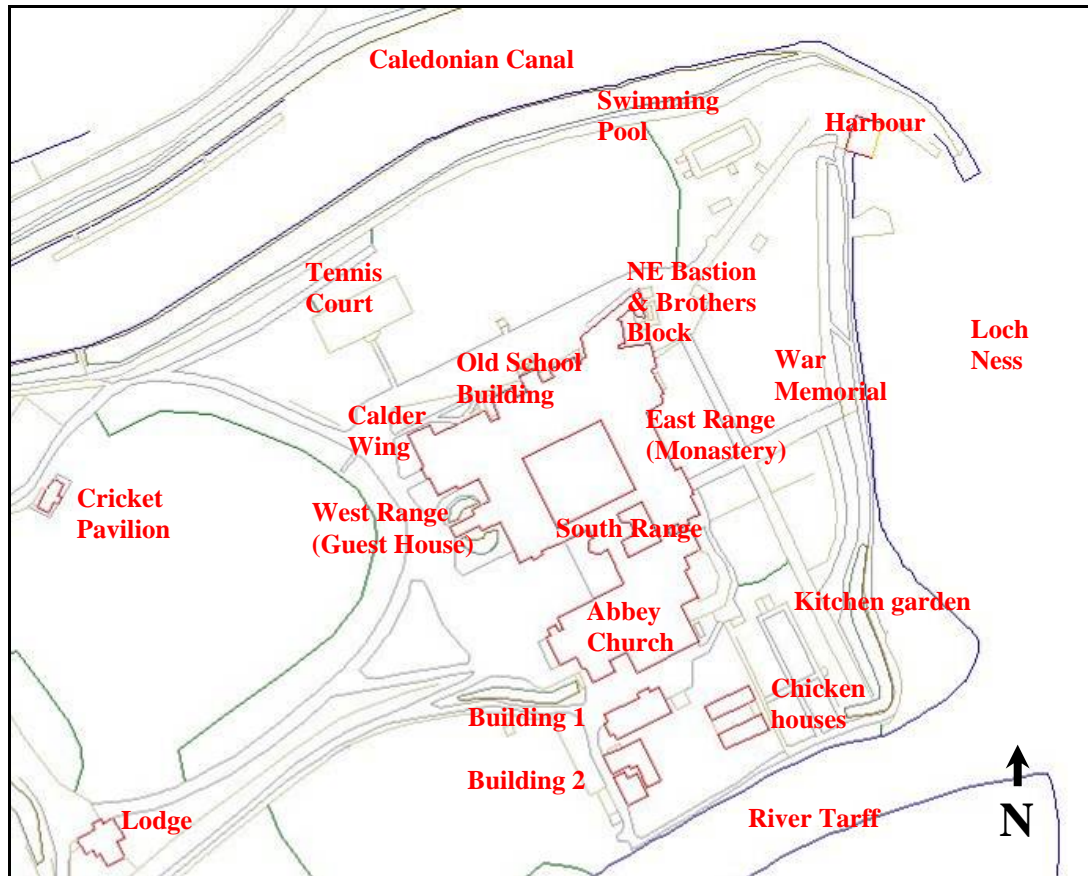
The objective is to provide a digital photographic record of the buildings before alteration and refurbishment. For later pictures the camera used was a Pentax Digital SLR with 6.1 megapixel resolution, fitted with a zoom lens. Earlier shots taken with a Nikon 3.2 megapixel camera with a 5.8 – 17.4mm zoom lens have been included also.

A watching brief is being maintained on the development and further photography is taking place to record this process as well as hidden features of the building that come to light in the course of the

works. At the time of writing, the Old School Building and West Range (Guest House) have been stripped out and photographed. Work is proceeding on the East Range (Monastery).

## *External Photography*

The buildings have been photographed externally from various angles including (where practical) from the top of the Old School building tower and from adjoining buildings.



**Figure 4 Abbey grounds**

Based on a drawing by LDN Architects with permission. Not to scale.

## *South Range*



**Figure 5 South Range from west**



### *Abbey Church*



**Figure 6 Abbey Church from south**



**Figure 7 Abbey church from west**



## *Grounds*



**Figure 8** Harbour and boathouse



**Figure 9** Buildings 1, 1a and 2 to south of church





**Figure 10 War memorial**



**Figure 11 Swimming Pool**

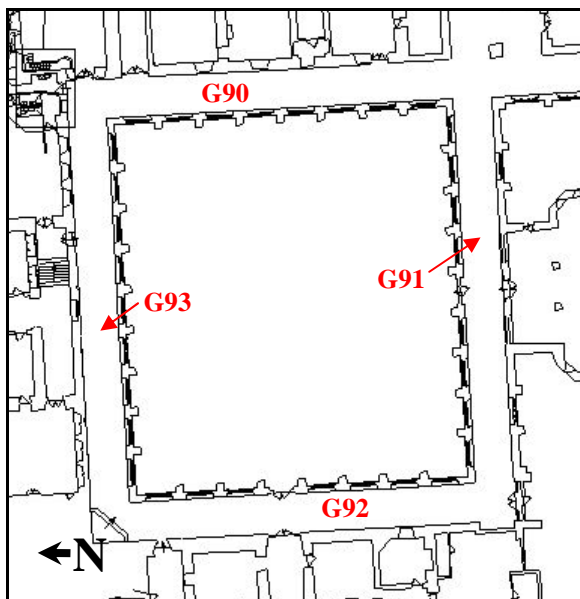


**Figure 12 Cricket Pavilion**

### ***Internal Photography***

The room numbers used here are based on those used on the plans by LDN Architects included in the Raven Group's report, *A Future for the Abbey* (2004). Where necessary additional numbers have been allocated using the same sequence.

### **Cloisters**



**Figure 13 Cloisters - plan**

Based on a drawing by LDN Architects with permission. Not to scale.



G90 East Cloister. This cloister extends south as a covered passageway to the east end of the church.



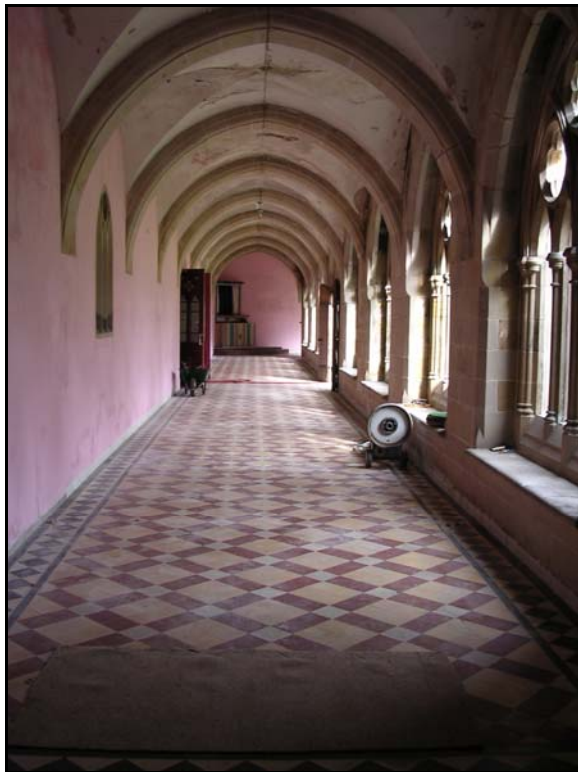
**Figure 14** East cloister (G90) looking N from the SE corner

G91 South Cloister

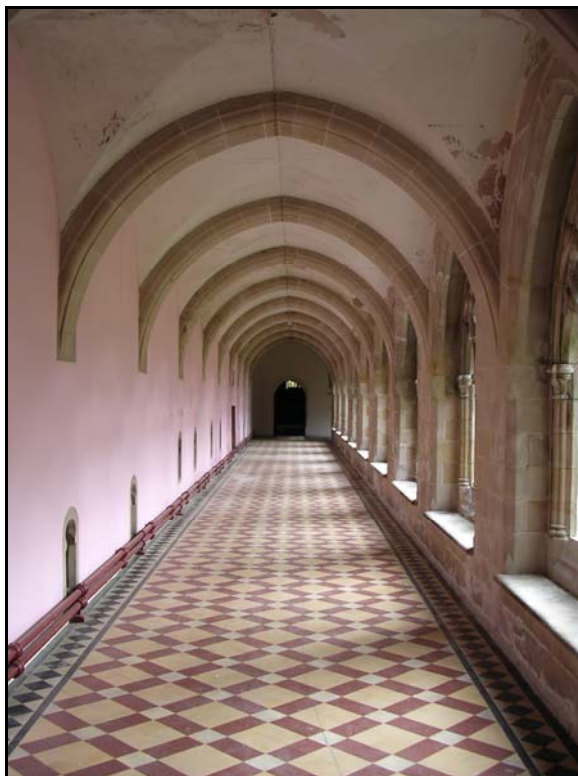


**Figure 15** South cloister, looking E from SW corner

G92 West Cloister.



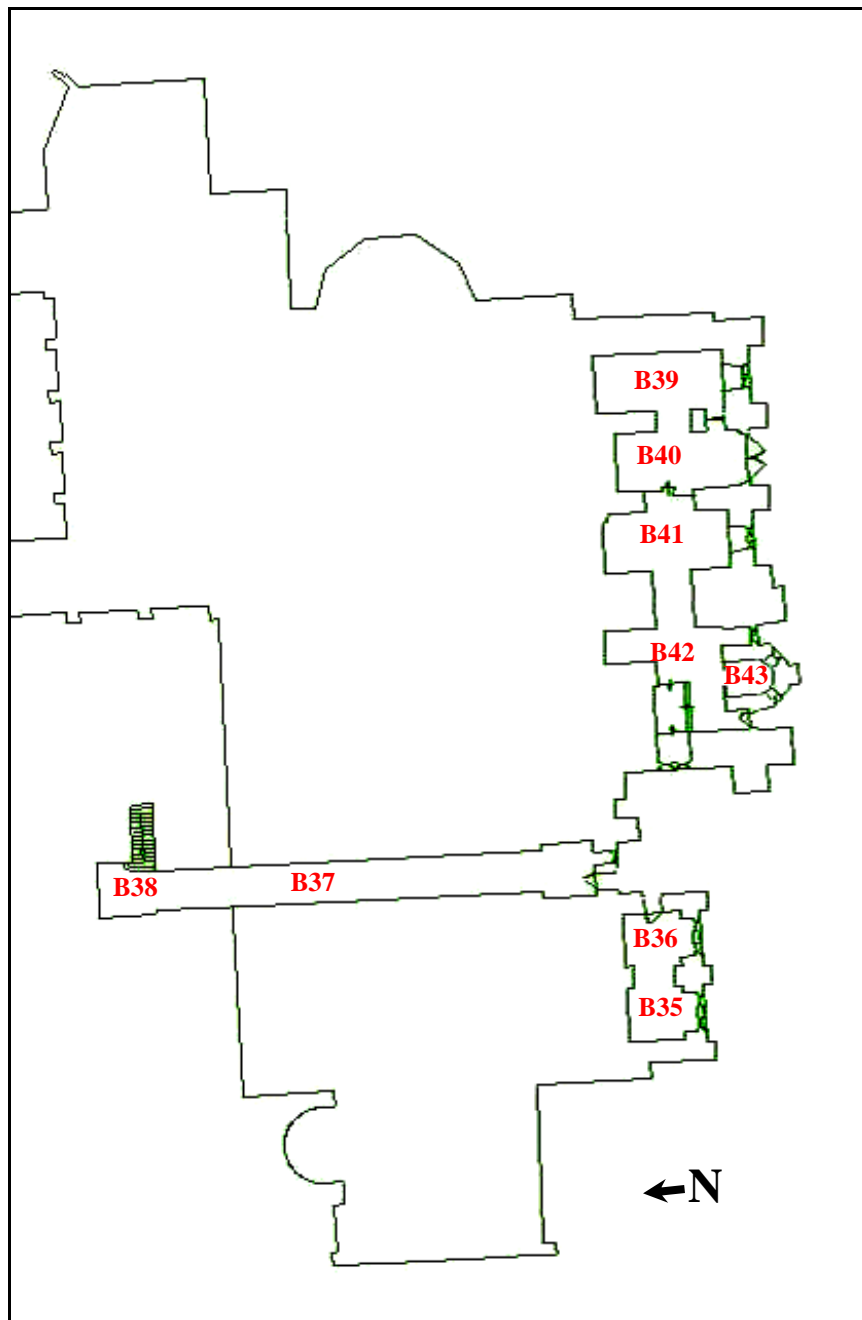
**Figure 16** West cloister, looking N from SW corner



**Figure 17** North Cloister (G93), looking E from the NW corner

G93 North Cloister. A feature of this side is the row of windows letting light into the basement beneath the Old School Building.

## South Range and Abbey Church - Basement



**Figure 18 South range and Abbey church – basement plan**

Based on a drawing by LDN Architects with permission. Not to scale.

### *General comments*

These rooms lie below the floor of the church and (apart from the passage B37-8) may have been intended originally as crypts. However they seem to have been used for heating, storage and as workshops. The mass concrete construction is evident.



## *Rooms*

### B35-6 Storerooms

B37-8 A passage leading beneath the church. The intention was apparently to join this into a planned covered way linking the church and the west cloister, but that was never built. The northern exit is blocked off. There is a duct leading off from this under the floor of the nave.

B39-42 Store-rooms and workshops.

B43 The base of the planned tower – a ladder leads up to the ground floor.

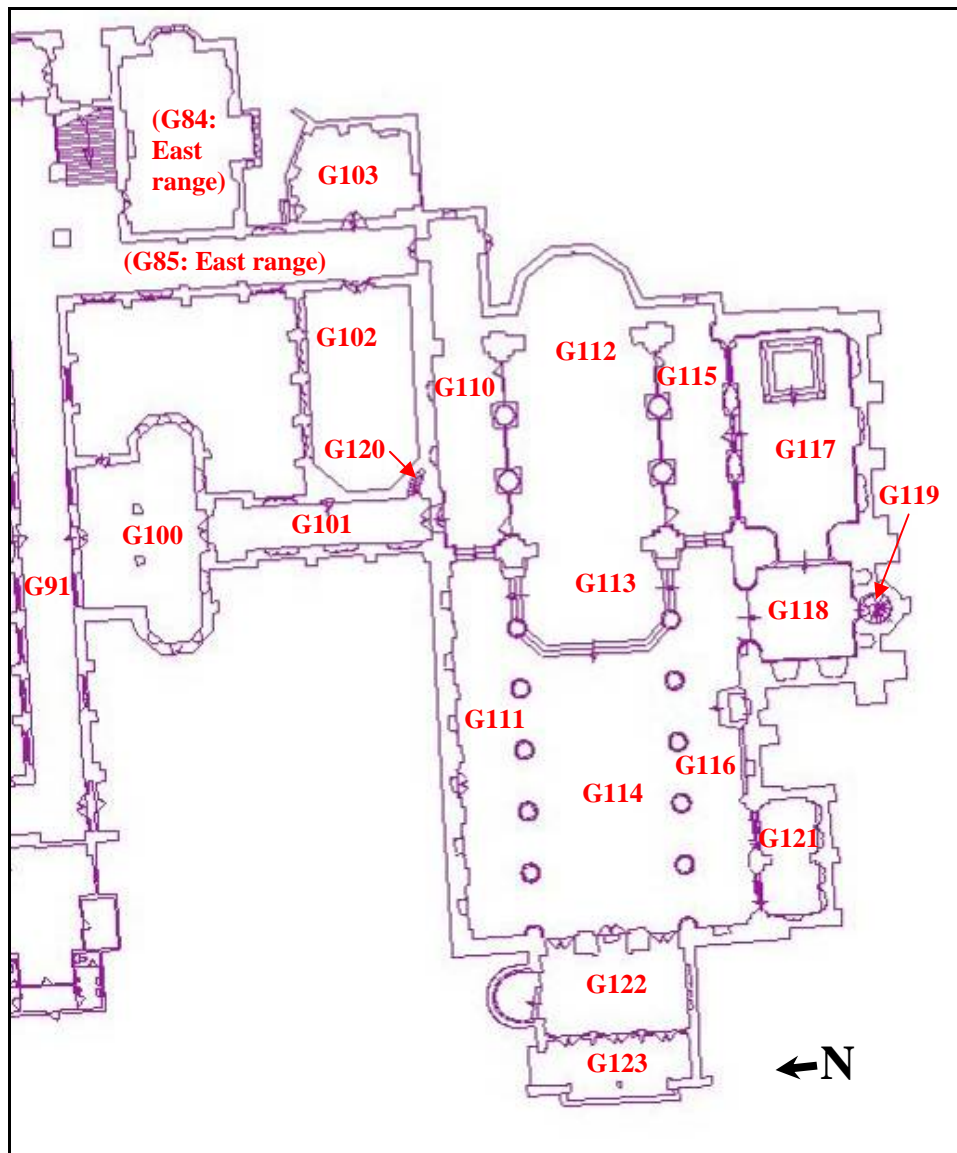


**Figure 19** Rooms B35-6



**Figure 20** Tunnel beneath church (B37-8)

## Ground Floor



**Figure 21 South Range and Abbey church - ground floor plan**

Based on a drawing by LDN Architects with permission. Not to scale.

### *General comments*

Note that G84 and G85 are included with the report on the East Range.

### *Rooms (South Range)*

G100 Sacristy – built as a scriptorium.

G101 Corridor linking sacristy and church, by Reginald Fairlie, 1914-18

G102 Chapter house

G103 Store – started in 1898 and intended as a sacristy but not completed. Finished off in modern style in 1980 by WW Allan.

*Rooms (Abbey Church)*

G110 East end of north aisle or ambulatory, completed by WW Allan in 1980.

G111 North aisle, constructed in the 1950s.

G112 Monastic Choir by Reginald Fairlie, 1914-18

G113 High Altar

G114 Nave, mainly by R Fairlie and A R Conlon 1949-56



**Figure 22 The Abbey church nave, High Altar and Monastic Choir (G112-4)**

G115 East end of south aisle or ambulatory, completed in 1980 by WW Allan.

G116 South aisle





**Figure 23** Stained glass window in G115 by Michael Farrelly, 1980



**Figure 24** Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament (G117)

G117 Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament by Reginald Fairlie 1914-18

G118 Chapel in base of planned tower

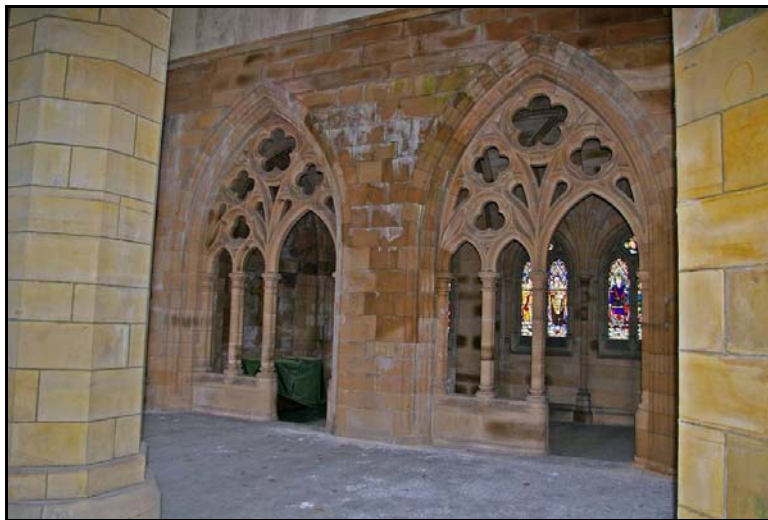
G119 Tower stairs

G120 Organ loft and staircase

G121 St Andrews chapel, the first part of the church to be finished in about 1893

G122 Narthex and baptistery, built in the 1960s by Charles W Gray

G123 Porch, built in the 1960s by Charles W Gray



**Figure 25 St Andrews Chapel**



**Figure 26 Narthex and Baptistry (G122)**

## Upper Floors

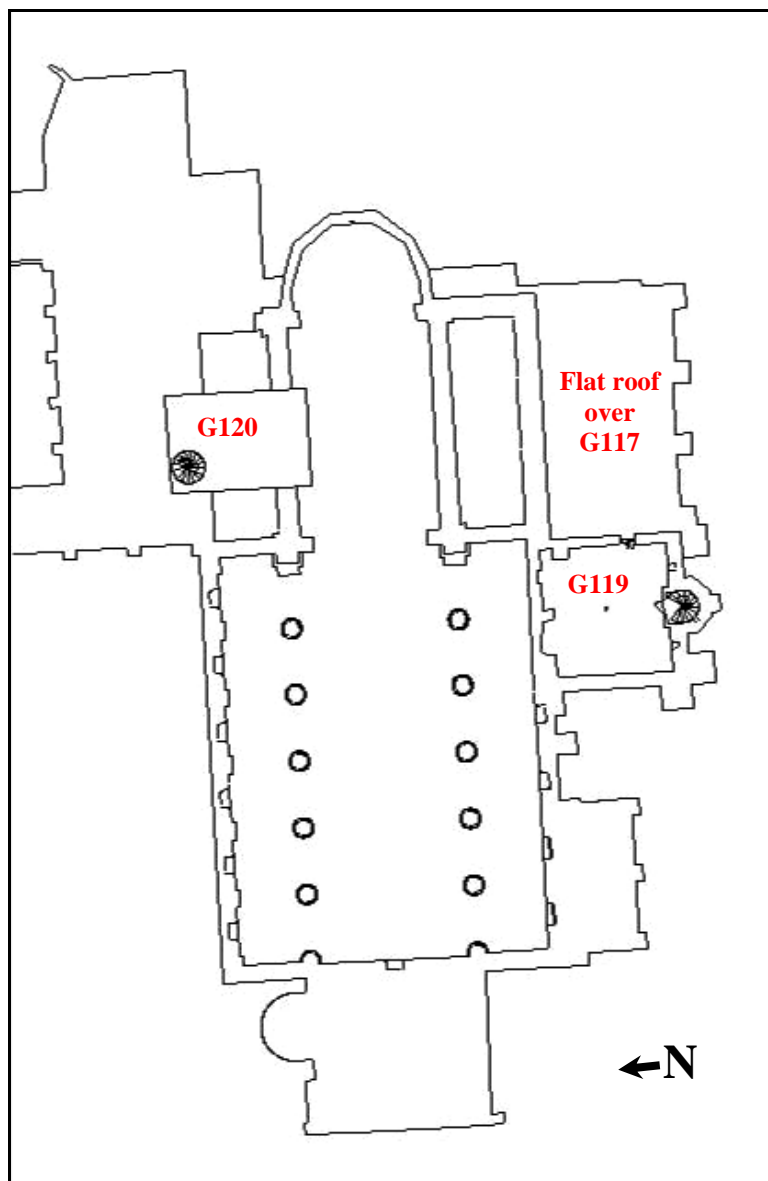


Figure 27 South range and Abbey church - upper floor plan

### *General comments*

The numbering of these two rooms is included in the ground floor sequence. There are no other upper floors in this group of buildings.

### *Rooms*

G119 A room looking out into the nave and providing access to the flat roof over G117. It is built within the intended tower, perhaps to cap off the otherwise unfinished structure. Note the largely brick construction.



G120 The Organ loft. The organ was installed in 1980.



**Figure 28 Room G119**



**Figure 29 G120 - the organ loft**

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

As with the other buildings surveyed, this report is necessarily of an interim nature. Once the other buildings have been photographed and the watching brief completed, a final report will be produced, drawing together any overall conclusions from this work

## References

The Raven Group 2004

*A Future for the Abbey*

Highland Archaeology Services Ltd

*Fort Augustus Abbey: Report on Site Investigations:  
July 2004* (Report No. HAS0481)

*James Miller's Plan of 1747* (NLS MS.1647 Z.02/65c) is available online courtesy of the  
National Library of Scotland at: <http://www.nls.uk/digitallibrary/map/military>