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Castle Roy

Nethy Bridge

Archaeological Investigation

Report

November 2012

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION

CASTLE ROY

NETHY BRIDGE

SITE CODE: NCR 11

REPORT CODE: FAS2012 520 NCR457

NGR: NJ 0065 2192

REPORT

November 2012

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Summary

This document presents the results of an archaeological investigation undertaken at Castle Roy, Nethy Bridge, Inverness-shire. The investigation was carried out by FAS Heritage on behalf of Addison Conservation and Design for The Castle Roy Trust. Fieldwork was undertaken between the 31st October and 2nd November 2011, the 26th and 30th March and the 8th and 9th October 2012.

The archaeological programme formed part of ongoing conservation works to Castle Roy. The programme commenced with a pre-intervention photographic and measured survey of the castle. Two geotechnical sondages and two phases of foundation consolidation were monitored by archaeological watching brief. An evaluation trench was also excavated to enhance understanding of the original form of the castle at the western corner.

The results of recording suggest that Castle Roy is built on a glacial rather than manmade mound and variation in the make-up of foundations is attributed to the emphasis of the northeastern elevation as the principal facade and to variations in the natural mound. Evaluation of the western corner alongside analysis of the extant fabric suggests that there was a small projecting turret at that point likely to have housed garderobes serving a small accommodation block.

Acknowledgements

FAS Heritage would like to thank Krystyna Pytasz, Addison Conservation and Design for her guidance and support, John Munro and colleagues for their cooperation during fieldwork and Richard and Patricia Eccles for their hospitality.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This document presents the results of an archaeological investigation undertaken at Castle Roy, Nethy Bridge, Inverness-shire. The investigation was carried out by FAS Heritage on behalf of Addison Conservation and Design for The Castle Roy Trust. Fieldwork was undertaken between the 31st October and 2nd November 2011, the 26th and 30th March and the 8th and 9th October 2012.

1.1 LOCATION AND LAND USE

Castle Roy is situated beside the B970 on the northern outskirts of the village of Nethy Bridge, approximately 5 miles southwest of Grantown on Spey in the Highlands of Scotland (NGR: NJ 0065 2192). The castle ruin occupies a small hill or mound overlooking the Spey valley (Figure 1; Plate 1). Castle Roy is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (952 NJ 006219).

Plate 1 Castle Roy looking south

1.2 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

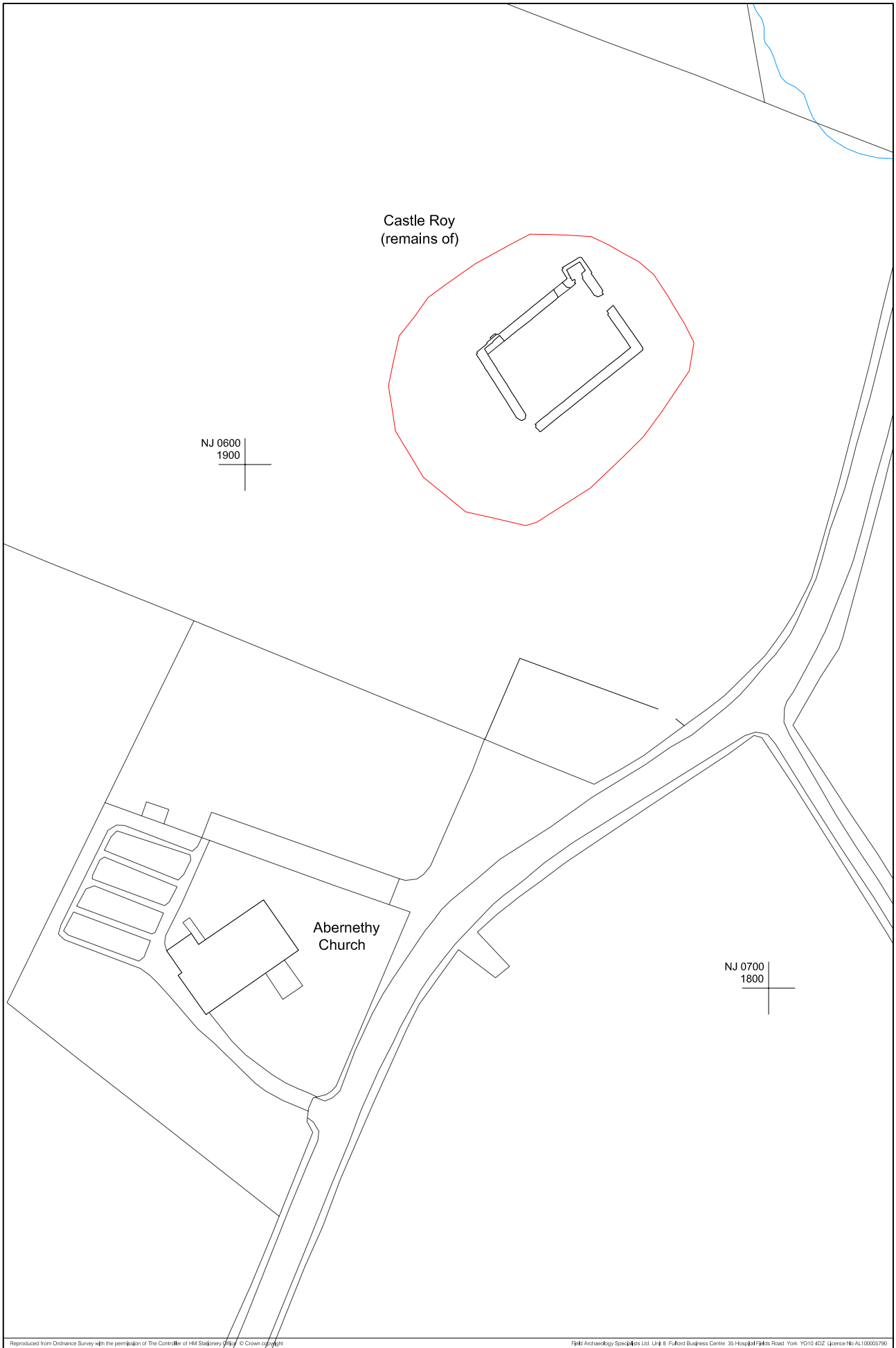
The programme of archaeological investigation was designed in response to the need for conservation of the monument. Prior to the commencement of the emergency works a pre-intervention record of Castle Roy, consisting of a photographic and measured survey, was undertaken (Intervention 1).

Following pre-intervention survey, a number of conservation works was undertaken under watching brief to preserve by record any archaeological remains impacted by the groundworks. This included monitoring of the excavation of two geotechnical sondages through the mound to the exterior of the castle (Intervention 2 and 3). These were undertaken to facilitate an assessment of the mound make-up, and the structural condition of the castle's foundations. Subsequent conservation works to the foundation of the northwest tower required groundworks which were monitored under watching brief conditions.

In addition, an archaeological evaluation trench was excavated close to the exterior northwest corner of the castle. The aim of the evaluation was to define the layout of a putative garderobe turret thought to project from the curtain wall and to enhance understanding of the adjacent structural remains.

1.3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Castle Roy is a simple late 12th- to 13th-century fortress consisting of a thick enclosing wall, with an entrance at the northern end and a small two-storey square tower at the northwest corner. A mural chamber in the western corner of the castle appears to be associated with a garderobe chute and possibly a window opening at first-floor level. The curtain walls are likely to have supported timber buildings, and the courtyard is thought to have contained a below-ground vaulted structure now buried.



Location map | Scale 1:1000 | Figure 1

The castle is thought to have been a residence of the Comwyns, the ruling family of Abernethy in the 13th century. John Comwyn gave up Abernethy to King Robert at Montrose in 1381. Castle Roy was named in the Charter of the Earldom of Moray in 1548 and may therefore have still been occupied. The site was part of the Revack Estate until 1998 when it was taken over by The Castle Roy Trust.

An archaeological investigation was carried out in advance of a car parking development adjacent to Castle Roy in 1995. No evidence for settlement or a defensive ditch was identified on the southern side of the castle (Mackenzie 1996, 57).

2.0 FIELDWORK PROCEDURE

The programme of archaeological investigation and resultant records is organised by a series of recorded interventions in order to create a structured archive (Figure 2; Table 1). The programme was guided by a series of Project Design approved by Dr Allan Rutherford, Historic Scotland which form part of the project archive.

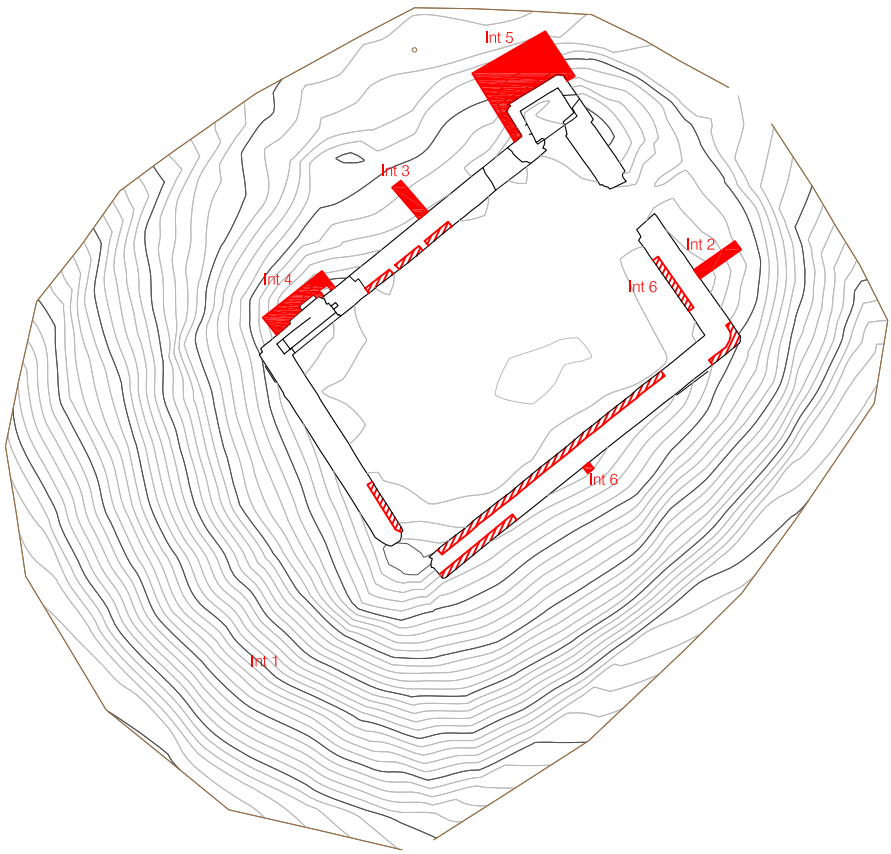
Table 1 Summary of interventions

Int.	Description	Date
1	Pre-intervention photographic and measured survey	10-11/11
2	Watching brief - geotechnical sondage	10-11/11
3	Watching brief - geotechnical sondage	10-11/11
4	Evaluation trench	03/12
5	Watching brief - foundation consolidation	03/12
6	Watching brief - foundation consolidation	10/12

2.1 INTERVENTION 1 - PRE-INTERVENTION PHOTOGRAPHIC AND MEASURED SURVEY

Prior to fieldwork a photographic and measured survey was undertaken and assigned Intervention 1. A photographic record using 35mm monochrome film and digital colour photography was made of all elevations, as well as a general external photographic record of the castle in its setting. Internally, a general photographic record was made as appropriate along with detailed record shots of all features of archaeological and architectural interest identified on site.

The interior of the castle and its immediate surrounding area forming a hill or mound were the subject of a detailed contour survey. In addition to individual data points, coded ‘strings’ of data were recorded to locate significant breaks of slope, as well as the various boundaries within the survey area. A number of traverses of data points were also recorded across the core site in order to create a series of profiles. The resulting contour map of the castle’s environs was generated using LisCAD software and was produced at 0.10m intervals.



Location of interventions | Scale 1:500 | Figure 2

2.2 EXCAVATION PROCEDURE

2.2.1 Watching Brief - Intervention 2, 3, 5 and 6

Two geotechnical trenches measuring *c*.3.0m long and *c*.0.6m wide (Intervention 2 and 3), and a trench along the northern exterior elevation of the square tower (Intervention 5) were excavated and reinstated using a tracked mechanical excavator under strict archaeological supervision. No significant primary archaeological deposits requiring hand-excavation were identified; all structural remains were left *in situ*.

2.2.2 Evaluation - Intervention 4

The evaluation trench measuring 5.0m x 1.5m was set out and opened by hand; all excavation was undertaken by hand (Intervention 4). On completion of the excavation and recording backfilling and reinstatement was completed by the principal contractor.

2.3 RECORDING PROCEDURE

A site grid based on the Ordnance Survey National Grid and Ordnance Survey Datum was established prior to the outset of intervention. Survey stations were set out around the site using a total station theodolite (TST) to facilitate archaeological recording. The position of the watching brief areas, evaluation trench, drawn sections and archaeological features were located using a TST.

Plans and section drawings, as well as full photographic recording, were made of the strata and structural features encountered within the trenches. The excavation and recording system employed during fieldwork is based on a set of principles known as *Field Research Procedure* (Carver 1999). Separate indices were maintained for contexts, features and structures.

3.0 FIELDWORK RESULTS

3.1 INTERVENTION 1

The pre-intervention photographic archive forms part of the project archive and the measured survey is presented in the figures in this report. The topographic survey recorded the contours of the mound on which Castle Roy sits (see Figure 2). The mound base slopes gently from northeast at 223m AOD to southwest at 218mAOD. The castle occupies a level plateau set between 224 and 225mAOD suggesting the stance had been levelled prior to construction. The northeastern elevation and north corner are set over the least steep part of the mound while the northwest, southwest and southeast elevations overlook steeper slopes.

3.2 INTERVENTION 2

Intervention 2 was located against the exterior of the northeast wall of the castle *c*.4.5m to the southeast of the entrance (see Figure 2; Plate 2). The trench measured 3.30m x 0.60m and was excavated to a maximum depth of 1.2m below ground level (BGL). The strata encountered and visible in the northwest-facing section consisted of a layer of firm, reddish-yellow sandy silt which lay at the base of the trench, and contained very frequent rounded cobbles, pebbles and gravel inclusions (C1005)(Figure 3; Table 2). C1005 was tentatively identified as a natural subsoil within the confines of the small trench. C1005 was overlain by a *c*.0.30m layer of brown silty sand allocated C1004 which contained frequent pebbles and gravel, but was otherwise sterile. C1004 was overlain by a similar deposit of dark grey silty sand containing frequent gravel, pebbles and cobbles (C1002), sealed in turn by a layer of turf forming the current ground surface (C1000).

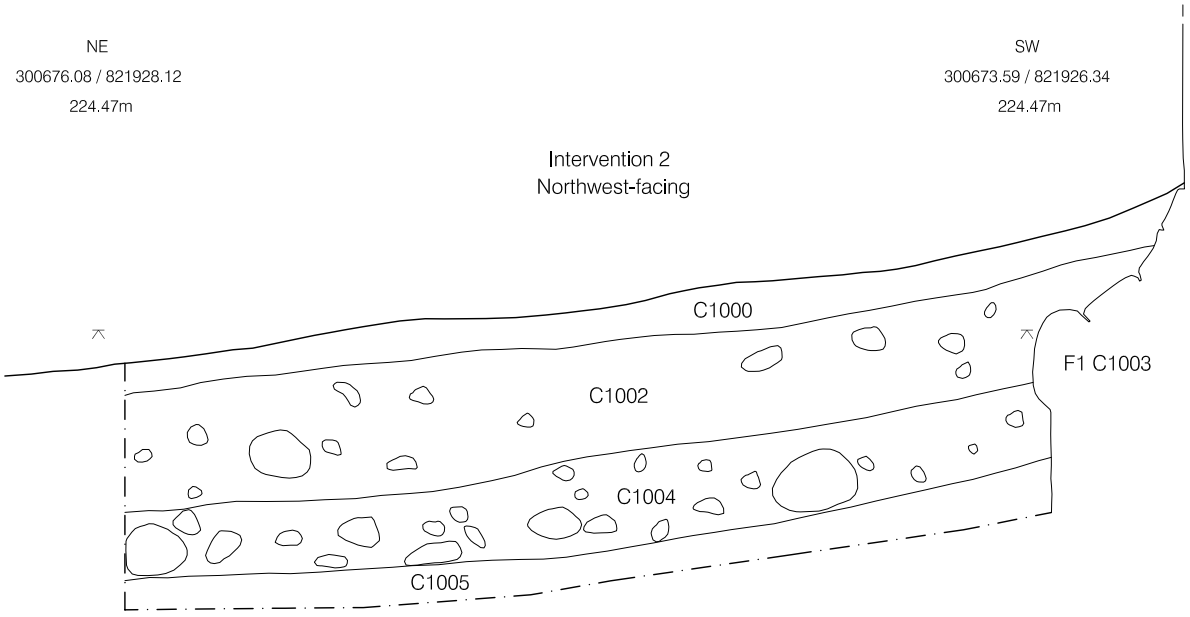
Plate 2 Intervention 2, F1 C1003 (scale 1.0m)

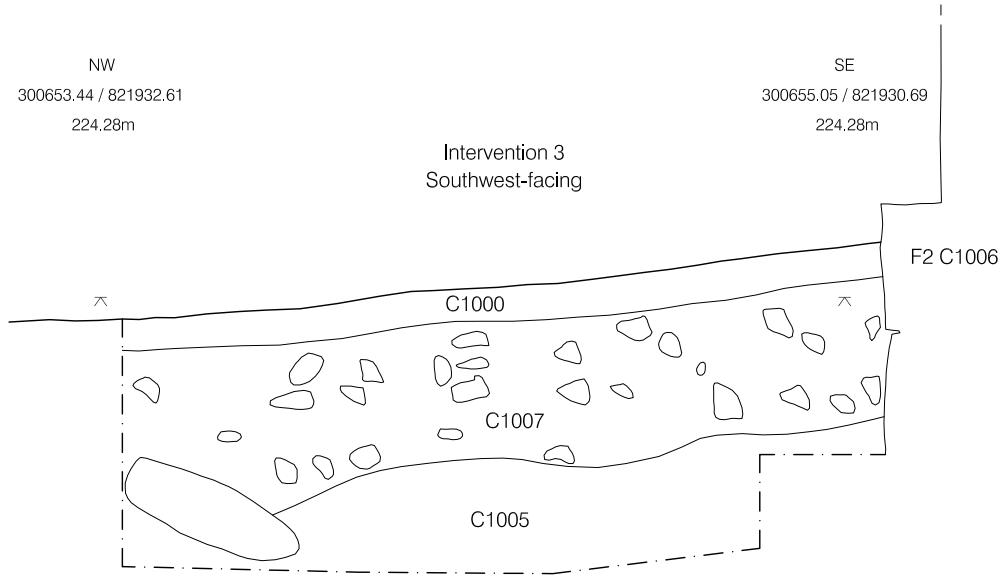
C1002 was found to abut the foundation of the northeastern castle wall (F1, C1003)(Table 3). The foundation consisted of three fairly rough courses of unbonded angular masonry splaying to form a 50° chamfer. The foundation was found to be *c*.0.60m deep and overlay C1004 which may therefore represent a buried topsoil.

No finds were recovered during the excavation of Intervention 2.

Table 2 Summary of context records

CNo	Identity	Description	Munsell
1000	Turf and topsoil	Shallow turf and topsoil cover, c.0.10m deep across the site	10YR 3/2
1002	Layer	Layer of silty sand with high frequencies of pebbles and cobbles	7.5YR 3/1
1003	Make-up	Three courses of unbonded, angular stonework	-
1004	Buried soil	Layer of silty sand with high frequencies of pebbles and gravel	7.5YR 4/4
1005	Subsoil	Layer of sandy silt with frequent rounded gravel, pebbles and cobbles	10YR 4/4
1006	Make-up	Single course of very large, unworked angular stones	-
1007	Layer	Layer of sandy silt with frequent gravel and pebbles and notable fragments of Old Red Sandstone at southeast end	7.5YR 3/1
1008	Make-up	Large slab and stone slab fragment	-
1009	Make-up	Irregular courses of unbonded, angular stone	-
1010	Make-up	Two courses of unbonded, angular stonework	-





Intervention 2 and Intervention 3 sections | Scale 1:25 | Figure 3

Table 3 Summary of feature records

FNo	Identity	Description
1	Foundation	Northeast wall foundation, 0.60m deep with chamfered profile
2	Foundation	Northwest wall foundation, 0.40m deep, stepped profile
3	Foundation	Turret foundation, 0.20m deep, stepped out 0.50m from northwest elevation
4	Foundation	North tower foundation, between 0.60 and 0.80m deep, stepped profile
5	Foundation	Southeast wall foundation, 0.35m deep, chamfered profile

3.2 INTERVENTION 3

Intervention 3 was located against the exterior of the northwest wall of the castle (see Figure 2). The trench measured 2.75m x 0.60m and was excavated to a maximum depth of 1.10m BGL (Plate 3). The strata defined in the southwest-facing section consisted of the layer of firm, reddish-yellow sandy silt (C1005) also observed within Intervention 2, which formed the base of Intervention 3 where it was seen to contain very frequent rounded cobbles, pebbles and gravel inclusions (see Figure 3). C1005 was more confidently identified as a natural subsoil within Intervention 3. C1005 was then overlain by a *c*.0.50m layer of dark grey sandy silt, C1007, which contained frequent rounded cobbles, pebbles and gravel, along with occasional small fragments of old red sandstone at the southeastern end of the trench, but was otherwise sterile. C1007 was sealed in turn by a layer of turf (C1000).

Plate 3 Intervention 3, F2 C1006 (scale 1.0m)

C1000 was found to abut the foundation of the northwestern castle wall (F2, C1006). The foundation in this part of the castle was found to consist of a single course of very large angular blocks of masonry projecting *c*.0.20m from the elevation of the wall. The foundation was found to be *c*.0.40m deep, overlying C1004.

3.3 INTERVENTION 4

Intervention 4 was excavated in order to explore the original form of a putative garderobe turret on the northern face of the northwestern corner of the castle (see Figure 2). The trench measured 5.0m x 1.5m and was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.5m. The turf (C1000), and layer of dark grey sandy silt, C1007, which contained frequent rounded cobbles, pebbles and gravel, were excavated by hand. C1007 was found to vary in thickness and covered a sloping interface sealing an underlying layer of brown silt sand containing fewer stone and gravel inclusions (possibly buried soil C1004). Once again, no archaeological material was encountered during the excavation.

The removal of C1000 and C1007 revealed structural evidence relating to the form of the garderobe turret. A large slab of stone was found to project from the exterior elevation of the castle wall by

c.0.50m directly beneath the southwestern edge of a fragment of barrel vaulting *c*.2.0m higher in the elevation (Figure 4; Plate 4). Immediately to the northeast of this slab, a large imprint in the mortar at the base of the wall, and the position of a large stone block beyond the wall indicated the former position of a similar stone slab to the northeast. These two stone slabs (F3 C1008) appear to have provided the foundation for two short walls projecting approximately 0.5m beyond the exterior elevation of the castle and coincide with a small projecting barrel vault above. It seems likely that a further stone slab would have spanned between the surviving slab and the parallel slab evidenced by the mortar imprint to form the end wall of the turret and a convenient low opening for the flow of effluent.

Plate 4 Intervention 4, F3 C1008 (scale 1.0m)

3.4 INTERVENTION 5

A watching brief was maintained during groundworks associated with the temporary propping and subsequent underpinning of the northwest foundation of the two-storey tower on the northern corner of the castle during March 2012. The initial de-turfing of the area was followed by the excavation of a 5.0m x 0.5m x 1.0m deep trench for the installation of three substantial timber uprights to support the temporary shoring system (Plate 5). Once the shoring had been constructed, the area around the northeastern foundations of the tower was excavated to a depth of approximately 1.0m below the former ground level to allow the foundations to be repaired.

Plate 5 Intervention 5 showing temporary supports

The foundations of the tower (F4 C1009) were found to consist of irregularly coursed unbonded rubble including a number of very large rounded blocks (Plate 6). The irregular and frequently voided foundations was offset approximately 0.30m from the face of the elevation above and varied from 0.6m to 0.8m in depth.

Plate 6 Intervention 5, F4 C1009 (scale 1.0m)

The strata encountered during the watching brief was identical to that observed in Intervention 3. The natural subsoil (C1005) consisted of firm,

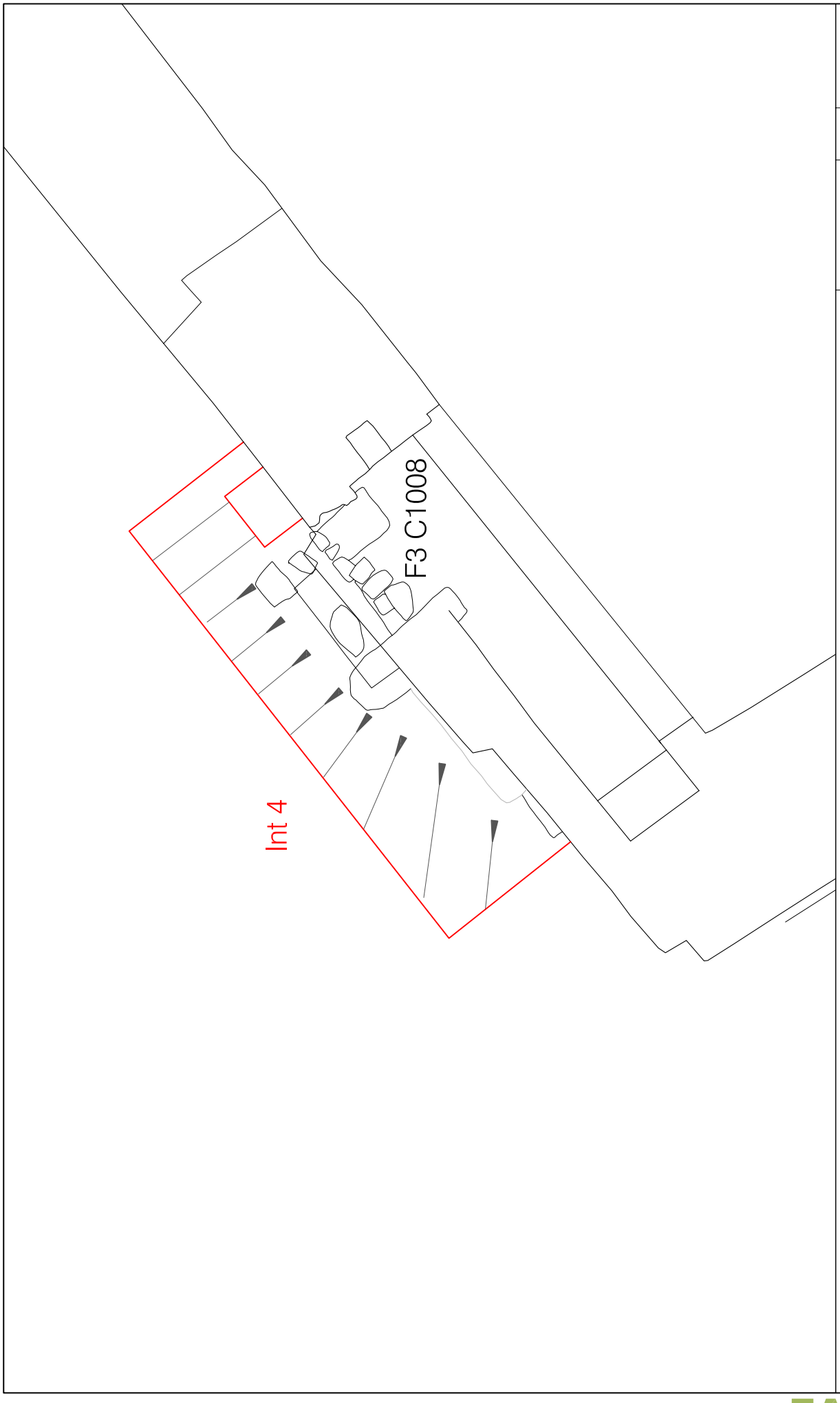


Figure 4

Scale 1:50

Intervention 4 - F3 C1008

reddish-yellow sandy silt containing very frequent rounded cobbles, pebbles and gravel inclusions. C1005 was then overlain by a *c*.0.50m layer of dark grey sandy silt, C1007, which contained frequent rounded cobbles, pebbles and gravel. C1007 was sealed in turn by a layer of turf (C1000). No archaeological material was noted or recovered from these deposits.

3.5 INTERVENTION 6

Intervention 6 was assigned to a watching brief maintained during underpinning of the foundations of the castle walls during October 2012. Work entailed a visual inspection by the conservation architect and principal contractor of the condition of foundations to identify where the stonework had become exposed by ongoing erosion and was clearly partly undermined. In these areas, loose soil was removed from joints using jets of compressed air. Following cleaning, the areas for treatment were packed with sand bags and the voids filled with an injection of a mixture of limecrete and foam to consolidate the foundation make-up. A record of the sections of foundations which were thus treated was made accompanied by record photography.

As part of the visual inspection of foundations, a localised testpit was excavated against the exterior of the southeast wall to prove the depth of foundation make-up. The foundations were found to consist of unbonded angular stonework down to 0.35m below ground level and somewhat shallower than the northeast and northwest foundations (F5 C1010)(Plate 7).

Plate 7 Intervention 6, F5 C1010 (scale 0.50m)

4.0 DISCUSSION

The results of the various interventions indicate that natural subsoil (C1005) lies between 0.6m and 0.8m below the ground surface on the exterior of the castle walls. The topsoil layers above this subsoil deposit were found to be archaeologically sterile, and rich in rounded cobbles, pebbles and gravel, reflecting the nature of the glacial subsoil. This soil sequence strongly suggests that the castle was built on a natural glacial hill rather than a man-made mound.

The foundations of the curtain walls were found to be fairly shallow and were often built on a buried topsoil deposit (C1004) rather than having been founded on natural subsoil. The difference in the construction technique used for the foundation of the northeast curtain wall (F1) as opposed to that of the northwest (F2) and southeast curtain (F5) wall was also noteworthy, as were the varying foundations depths recorded. While it is possible that these differences in the foundations represent a chronological sequence in the development of the castle, it may simply have been a result of the relative importance of the northeastern wall being the principal elevation of the castle containing a substantial and fairly impressive door opening. The pre-existing contours of the natural glacial mound

may also have been a factor.

Various structural features noted during the course of the archaeological investigation hint at the form of the now vanished internal buildings of the castle. The mural chamber in the western corner of the castle includes a short length of vaulting projecting from the external elevation of the northwestern curtain wall. Adjacent to this projection, the remains of a garderobe chute issuing from the level above also survive. The presence of a first-floor level in this corner of the castle is also evidenced by the remains of one side of a window opening at this level. These features seem to indicate that this corner of the castle contained a two-storey building lit at first-floor level by at least one window, and served by a mural garderobe chamber on each floor. The vaulting projecting out of the castle and the coinciding foundations identified in Intervention 4 (F3) indicate that the ground floor mural garderobe chamber would have formed a rectangular turret projecting from the elevation of the curtain wall by approximately 0.5m. No evidence survives to indicate the presence of window openings in the ground floor mural chamber or garderobe. It is possible that these areas were lit from the interior of the castle given their proximity to ground level on the exterior.

The presence of the large arched window opening at the eastern end of the northwestern curtain wall indicates that this putative two-storey internal building did not extend along the full length of the curtain wall. The height of this window suggests that the internal building in this area was single storey, and may have been a hall with a two-storey solar range to the southwest. If this was the case, the two-storey tower at the northern corner of the castle would have been accessed at ground-floor level from the hall.

The southeastern curtain wall survives to a greater height than the opposing long wall of the castle. While this elevation does not include any obvious window openings, it does contain a substantial horizontal recess set at a fairly high level. Although this recess was filled suggesting a later phase of adaptation, the stone and mortar fill has partially collapsed revealing the original feature. This recess appears to be too substantial to represent a roof scar, and has been interpreted as a wall plate recess which would indicate the presence of a fairly high first-floor level within an internal building running the full length of the curtain wall. The lack of window openings and garderobe features suggests that this building may have been a service range and/or stables with storage above.

The lack of evidence for internal buildings at the northeastern and southwestern ends of the castle should not be taken as proof that internal buildings did not exist in these areas. It should also be noted that the remains of external castle buildings may well exist in the immediate environs of the standing building.

The presence of considerable amounts of stone on the northwestern side of the castle exterior, and the northern part of the castle interior was also noted. These dumps of stone are considered to represent clearance cairns occupying the most accessible parts of the site, rather than rubble features directly derived from the collapse of castle fabric.

5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Given how little is understood regarding the history and archaeology of this site, it is recommended that any further groundworks on the exterior of the building required during the conservation programme are the subject of continued archaeological monitoring. It is also clear that the interior of the castle may have high archaeological research potential since it may contain well-preserved archaeological remains relating to the form and development of the interior castle buildings. As such, any necessary groundworks within the castle should be excavated archaeologically to ensure that an adequate archaeological record is secured. While any such works may provide valuable evidence for the form and development of this poorly understood site, it is strongly recommended that the opportunity to carry out a research evaluation of the castle interior is taken as part of the conservation programme. Such an evaluation would provide a much clearer understanding of the archaeological potential of the site to inform future presentation, research, and management of the monument.

It was noted during the photographic and measured survey which was undertaken concurrently with the watching brief that debris and vegetation obscured the upper parts of the curtain walls throughout the castle. These areas would benefit from archaeological inspection if they are cleared during conservation works as further evidence for first-floor features such as window openings may survive in these areas.

The presence of two large clearance cairns in the interior of the castle obstruct access to the tower and the northern part of the castle interior for the conservation team, and future visitors to the site. It is recommended that this debris is removed from the castle under archaeological supervision and stockpiled as a low linear clearance cairn along northern boundary of the monument thereby forming an unobtrusive feature in an area of the site which already contains cleared stone material.

6.0 ARCHIVE

A paper and electronic copy of this report will be sent to Krystyna Pytasz, Addison Conservation and Design, Richard Eccles, The Castle Roy Trust, Dr Allan Rutherford, Historic Scotland and the Highland Historic Environment Record. A note on the results of the archaeological programme will be prepared and submitted to *Medieval Archaeology* and *Discovery and Excavation in Scotland*.

References

Secondary sources

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