

CASTLE FRASER COURTYARD CLUNY

ABERDEENSHIRE

REPAVING PROJECT 2011



- Archaeological Excavation -
Carried out 14th-18th March 2011
by
Murray Archaeological Services Ltd



Report No: MAS 2010-3
by
H K Murray and J C Murray

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1. Background

- 1.1 In the winter of 2010/2011 a decision was made by Paul Selway, surveyor for the National Trust for Scotland that an area of paving c 9.5 x 6.5m across the south end of the castle courtyard had become unsafe. Due to the cracking of many of the slabs there were Health and Safety issues which required the slabs to be lifted and all broken slabs replaced. The new paving was to be set in a more permanent sub-base. This had the potential to disturb underlying features and will also seal them permanently for the foreseeable future.
- 1.2 As a result Dr Shannon Fraser, archaeologist for the National Trust for Scotland determined that it was advisable to archaeologically test the area below the paving to assess and record the degree of survival of foundations – in particular those of the 17th century external stair to the first floor hall and of the late 18th-early 19th century internal stairway to the hall and the east and west wings.
- 1.3 In January 2004 archaeological observation of the narrow cable trench N/S across the paving during the re-wiring project revealed that an existing N/S drain had cut through a substantial mortared stone foundation (Illus 24: context 22) c 900mm wide at a point c 5m from the face of the north wall of the hall; it was considered possible that this was part of the stair foundation. The top of the foundation was 150-200mm below the paving.

1.4 Murray Archaeological Services Ltd was commissioned by the National Trust for Scotland to undertake the excavation prior to the replacement of the paving.

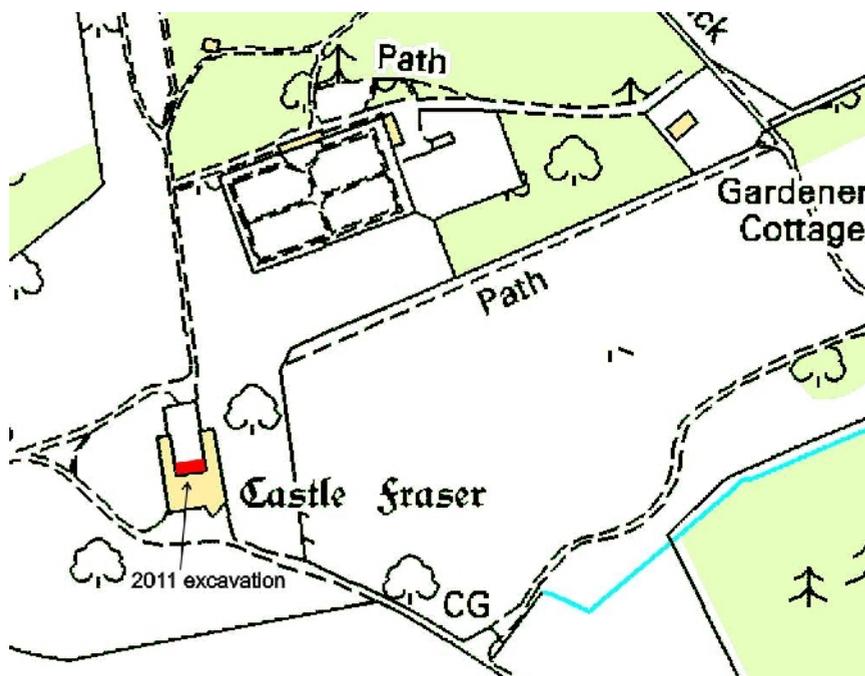
1.5 The excavation took place between the 14th and the 18th March 2011.

2. The site

2.1 The courtyard lies to the north of the main block of the castle, between the east and west wings. The paving to be replaced was at the southern end, adjacent to the castle wall.

Parish: Cluny NGR: NJ 7227 1257

NMRS ref: NJ71SW.6 Aberdeenshire SMR ref: NJ71SW0006



Illus 1 Location of the site ©Crown Copyright License No. 1000023880.

3. Documentary sources

3.1 The excavators are grateful to Dr Shannon Fraser for access to the main documentary information and to the images of the estate plans and for discussions of both.

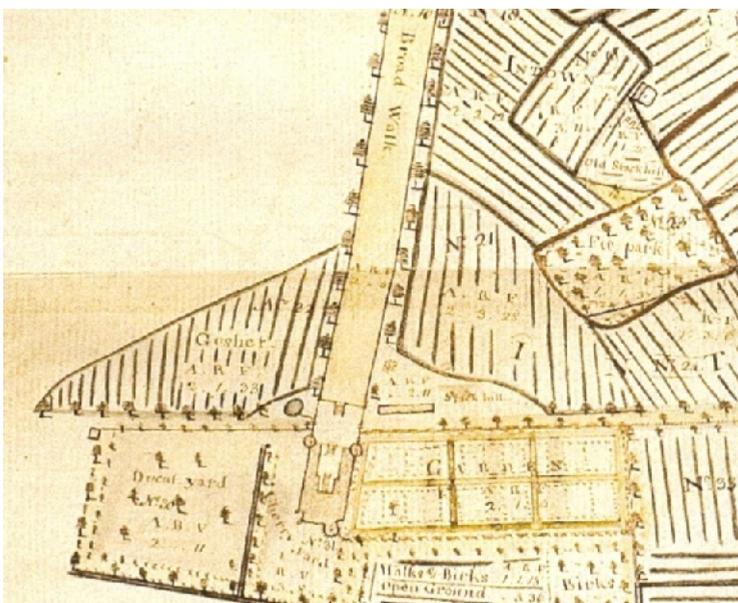
3.2 Summary of main documentary references

1788 The earliest estate plan of Castle Fraser dating to 1788 shows a central staircase leading up to the now blocked first floor entry in the north wall of the castle which seems to have formed part of major modifications to the building c1615-35.



Illus 2 North wall of the castle showing the blocked first floor entrance which related to the stairs shown on 1788 plan

The line of the stair is framed by the 17th century east and west wings and is the focus of the Broad Walk leading towards the castle. This stair is shown extending just beyond the north end of the original stable and kitchen blocks; this would coincide with the northern limit of the paving.



Illus 3 Detail of 1788 plan. Courtesy of Aberdeen University Library

1794-1799. There is a slight possibility that the new S entrance and the first phase of the N stair were commissioned by William Fraser after he had the 1788 plans drawn up. However, the documentary evidence seems to suggest that it is more likely that this work, possibly including the arcades in the courtyard, was commissioned in the period 1794-1799 by Elyza Fraser whose coat of arms were placed over the new S doorway. This work was completed before Johnstone's plan was drawn in 1799.

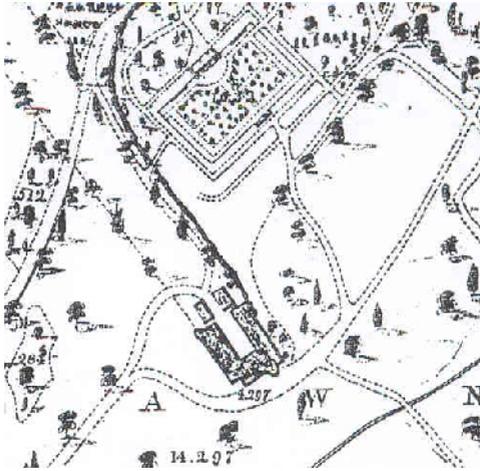
Early 1820s A lithograph of the castle from the north by C. J. Hullmandel shows the castle after the main entrance has been moved to the south face of the castle and a two-storied building which housed the internal stair to the first floor has replaced the external northern stair. This clearly shows the central block with a flat roof and a cupola; it has a crescent-shaped window at ground floor level and a large window with three lights at first floor level. This central block is flanked by archways at ground floor level giving access to the ground floor and at first floor level a landing or passage with a small rectangular window; this is shown clearly on the eastern side but is somewhat masked by shadow on the western side.



Illus 4 Castle Fraser from north early 1820s by C J Hullmandel

1825-6 Accounts for the year 1825-6 include accounts for building what appear to be the lodges and the arched entrance between them. This work would have been commissioned by Colonel Charles Mackenzie Fraser who inherited from his great aunt Miss Elyza Fraser in 1813 and owned the property until his death in 1871.

The lodges are clearly shown on an estate map variously dated between 1816 and 1846 and which may be the plan referred to in the accounts for 1830.



Illus 5 Detail from estate plan of 1816/1846, possibly c 1830

1852 An engraving by R W Billing of 1852 shows the cupola from the north-west but adds no additional structural detail. A James Giles painting (NLS:GB233/MS.20346) confirms the detail of the central block but the side wings are obscured by the lodges.



Illus 6 NTS Archive (1852) R W Billing (Redaway Engraver)

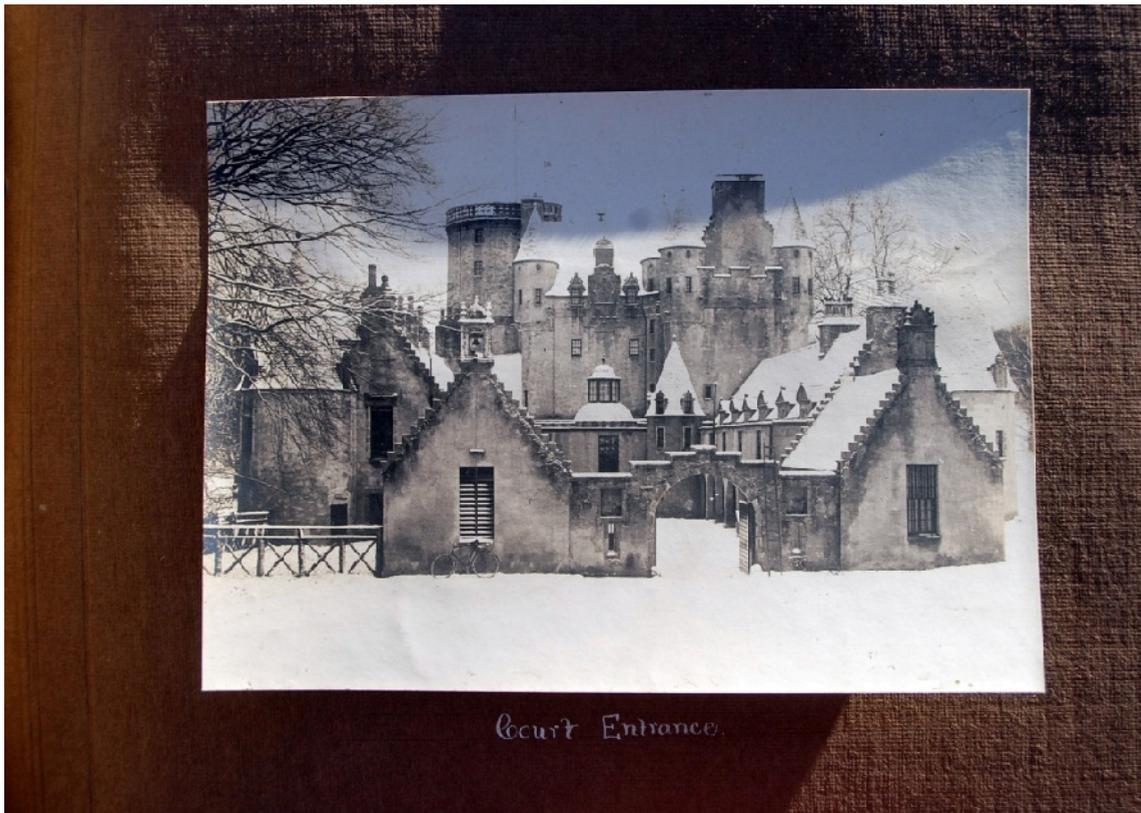
1864-7 The 1st edition Ordnance survey map surveyed in 1864-7, published in 1869 is shows the arcades clearly and shows new structures between the lodges and the wings and arcades. However the small western turret of the stair block has not been added by this stage.



Illus 7 Detail from 1st edition Ordnance Survey map surveyed 1864-7, published 1869

c1880 A photograph by Valentine of Dundee dated c 1880 show a considerable alteration as an outer stair has been added to give access to the first floor rooms of the east and west wings and what is visible is the new northern wall of this outer stairway, with a single light central window and a smaller window to the east. The small turret has been added to the west. These additions would therefore appear to have been made between c 1864 and 1880.

1920s Two photographs of the north side of the castle in the 1920s confirm these details and show little further change in this area.



Illus 8 Castle Fraser from north 1920s NTS archive



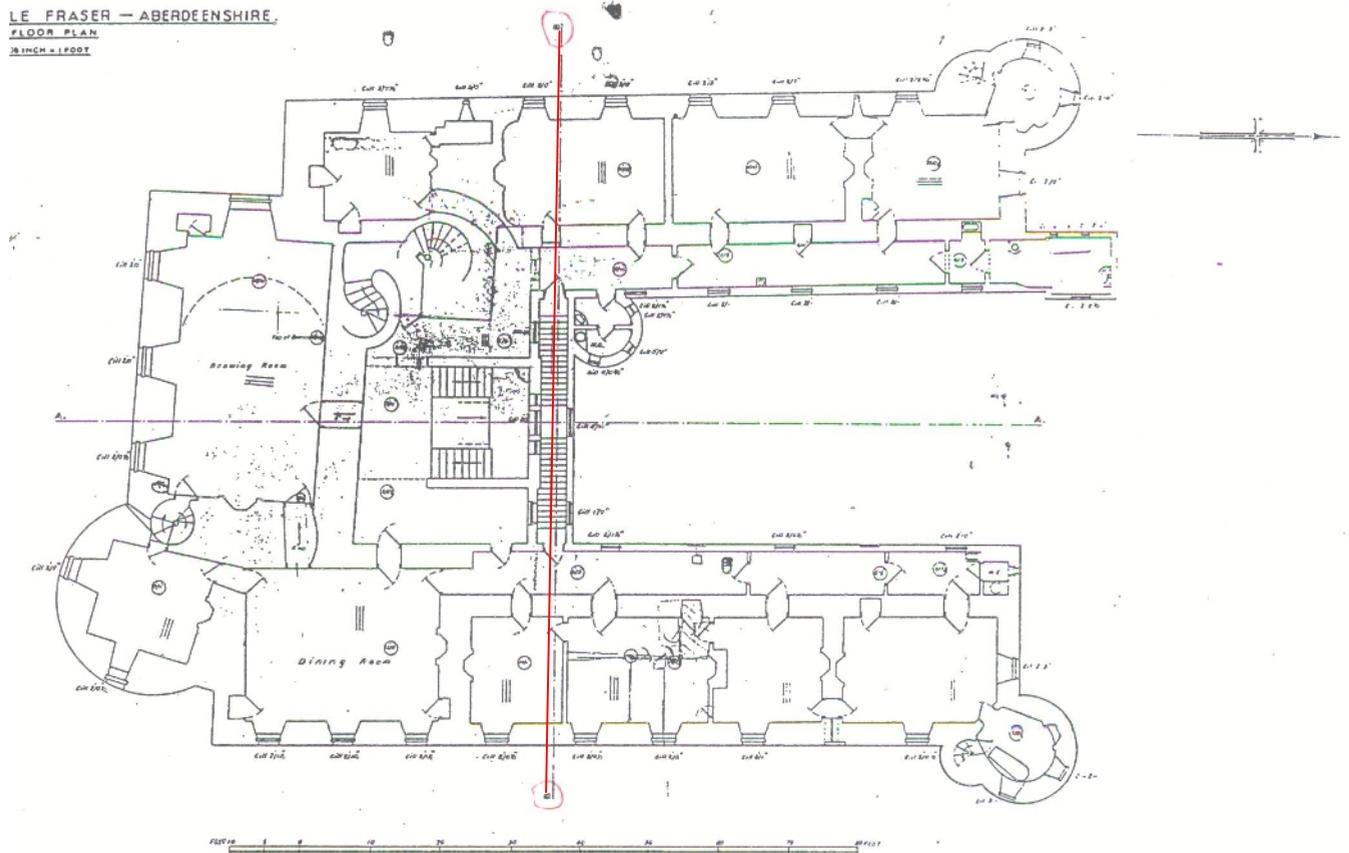
Illus 9 Castle Fraser from north 1920s NTS archive



Illus 10 Castle Fraser internal view looking south 1920s NTS archive

An interior view of the same date, taken from the landing of the late 18th century stair looking south, shows the corner of the blocked 17th century first floor entrance into the hall. At ground floor level it shows the doorway into the laigh hall

1923 Plans and elevations of the castle in RCAHMS (ABD 18/13) by Robert Lorimer. The elevation is slightly confusing as it is in part elevation but also a section through the east and west wings of the castle and through the outer stairway, between the north wall of the stairway and the north wall of the original stairway block. This gives a detailed view of the structure that is shown in the 1920s photographs and as it appears to have been after the changes that took place c.1864-1880. At ground floor level in the original stair block the crescent window has been replaced by a doorway and at first floor level the central window with three lights and the flanking single windows remain. The secondary outer stair and new external north wall are drawn. This outer wall is shown on the first floor plan as having a central window with a single light, a narrower window to the east and the small turret to the west. Stairways run up to the east and west from either side of the central doorway into the original stair block, giving access to the rooms



**Illus 13 Castle Fraser first floor plan (Red emphasises the line B-B of the section in illus 11)
(copyright RCAHMS)**

Pre-1942 Two photographs in the archive (not illustrated here) dated to before 1948 show the outer stair north wall with the western turret intact so are likely to pre-date c 1942.

c1942 A RCAHMS photograph of c 1942 shows the cupola and the central first floor window of the outer stairway but the western turret has been removed (This date is given to the photograph in SCRAN Scran ref:000-000-596-241-C RCAHMS ref: AB/1328 and digital ref SC802386)



Illus 14 RCAHMS 1942 (copyright RCAHMS)

c 1948 A photograph of *c 1948* showing the WW2 Nissen hut outside the courtyard gives a clearer view showing the cupola and central window of the outer stairway. The first floor window on the eastern side is visible. The western first floor window is shown blocked and the small turret removed.



Illus 15 Castle Fraser from the north. *c 1948* NTS archive

Between 1948 and 1965 After WW2 thieves stole the lead from the flat roof of the stair extensions and they were subsequently demolished in 1950.

4 Methodology

4.1 The paving slabs were lifted by hand by building contractors under the supervision of MAS Ltd. It became immediately apparent that in many areas there were wall foundations directly below the slabs so although some rubble was removed by mini-digger, most of the excavation of the rubble was done by hand. Three sondages (Sondages 1-3) were excavated to natural. All features were planned (Illus 19), photographed (Appendix 1) and recorded (Appendix 2).

5 Results

When the paving (1) and sub-base (2,3) were removed, the basal course and foundations of parts of four walls were exposed (Illus 19: 9, 10, 11, 13) with the area between them filled with a thick layer of rubble (7) which included broken stone and mortar and fragments of thick white plaster assumed to be from the internal wall faces. This rubble is interpreted as deriving from the demolition of the late 18th and 19th century stair block in the mid- 20th century.

In the central area between walls 9 and 11, the rubble lay over a compact mortar surface which had the outlines of large rectangular stone flags (illus 16); it is suggested that the paving (1) being replaced in 2011 had been taken off this mortar bedding and that it had formerly been used as the flooring at ground floor level within the earlier phase of the stair block.



Illus 16 Mortar layer 8 with slab impressions

The mortar (8) layer lay over a very rough pebbly layer (12); this was originally thought to be an earlier cobbled surface but it was very rough and it may simply have been sub-base for the mortar.

The two thicker walls (9 and 11) were both at right angles to the N wall of the castle and enclosed an area 4.75m wide (E/W) and 5.5m N/S up to the face of the only E/W wall (13). These appear to be the foundations of the main block that held the rotunda.



Illus 17 Wall 9 and arch block 17 looking S

A painting probably of the early 1820s by C J Hullmandel shows that to the E and W there were arched passageways at ground level with the first floor extending over them; mortared block 17 may be the base of the E side of the W arch (illus 17); the equivalent area of the E arch was not excavated. It should be noted that the W passage was only c 1.5m wide internally, whereas the E passage was c 2.25m wide. This asymmetry can be seen on the 1923 plan (illus 12).

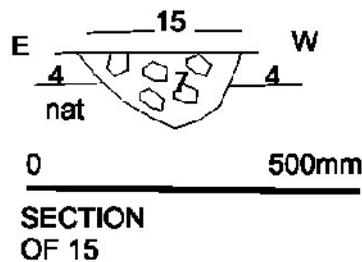
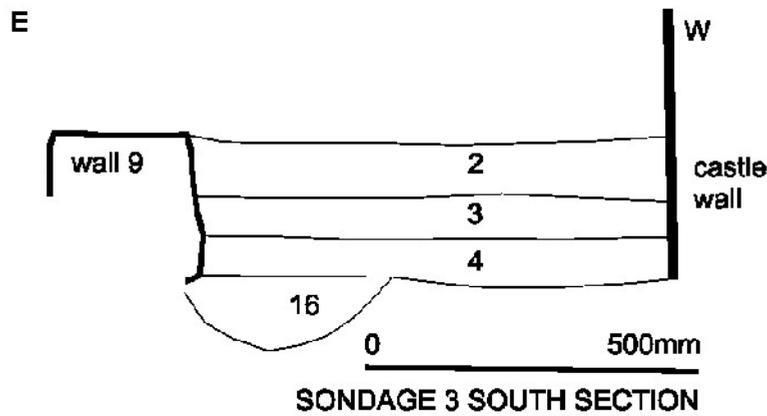
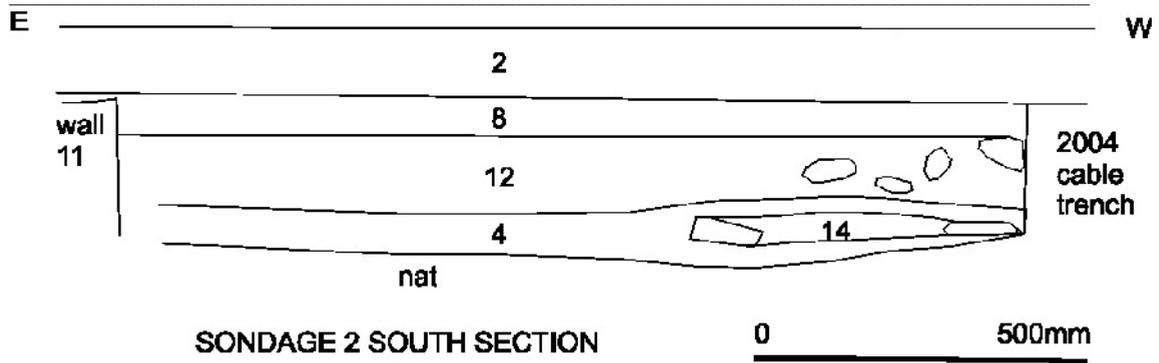
The E/W wall 13, which is truncated on the N side by the drain, is interpreted as the front wall of the first phase of the new internal stair. Later, when the stairs to the rooms on the first floors of the wings were added, this became an internal wall and a central door was broken through.

The third, narrower N/S wall (illus 19: 10) and traces of stonework observed on the E side of the cable trench in 2004 (illus 23: context 22) appear to extend only c 3.4m S from the inner face of wall 13. These are interpreted as the bases for the flight of stairs leading from the castle S entrance (Laigh Hall) to the first landing.



Illus 18 Looking SW from first floor office, showing walls 9,10,11,13 and mortar surface 8

The 2011 excavation did not extend N beyond wall 13 into the footprint of the second phase of the works in the mid 19th century which comprised internal stairs to the E and W wings. However the 2004 observation of the cable trench revealed wall traces (Illus 24: 21, possibly 19, Illus 26) which may have been remnants of the N wall of this later

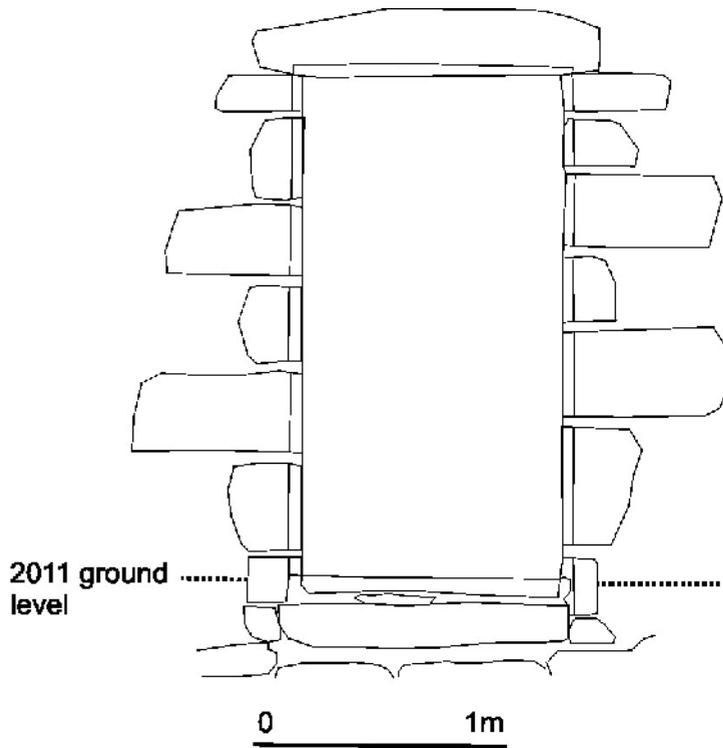


Illus 20 Sections of sondages 2 and 3 and context 15

The excavation also revealed that doorway of the present kitchen and possible original stable was originally slightly taller as the present threshold is a replacement some 140-150mm above the top of the earlier threshold (Illus 21, 22). The original door height was 2.10m.



Illus 21 Kitchen door showing earlier threshold below present threshold



Illus 22 Elevation of kitchen doorway

6 The Finds

The only finds were a small sherd of 19th century china and the bowl of a late 17th/early 18th century clay tobacco pipe with 'roses' of dots on the sides of the bowl of Dutch manufacture and probably dating to between c 1630 and 1720 (*cf* Cameron and Stones, 2001, illus 193:666-667). Both were in rubble W of wall 9, below the paving.

7 Interpretation

The excavation revealed and confirmed much of the ground plan of the late 18th and 19th century stair block which had been removed in the mid 20th century. There is no positive evidence of the 17th- century stair but it should be noted that the asymmetry of the late 18th and 19th century plan places the wall 10 and the possible wall 2004 context 22 in line with the sides of the now blocked 17th- century first floor entrance in the north wall of the castle; it is possible but not provable that some of the fabric of these walls dates to the 17th-century stair.



Illus 23 Excavation in relation to blocked doorways in N wall of castle. Ranging rods indicate position of walls 9, 10, 11 (R to L)

8 References

Cameron, A S & Stones, J A 2001 *Aberdeen: an in depth view of the city's past.*

Edinburgh: Soc Antiq Scot (Monograph ser 19).

Slade, H G 1977-8 'Castle Fraser: a seat of the antient family of Fraser', *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 109, 233-300.

Acknowledgements

Murray Archaeological Services Ltd would like to thank Dr Shannon Fraser for discussion of and providing access to historical resources and for her support throughout.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Catalogue of digital photographic record (on CD)

Digital frame number	Content
1-5	General views of removal of paving
6	Looking E to kitchen door
7	Looking N
8-11	Details of kitchen door showing earlier threshold
12-15	Looking S, general views
16-30	Views down on the site from first floor, looking W and SW
31-37	Views of the walls looking S
38-41	Views of the walls looking SE
42-46	Views of the walls looking S
47-54	Looking S, relating site to blocked doorways
55-60	Kitchen door detail
61-66	Mortar 8 and details of slab marks

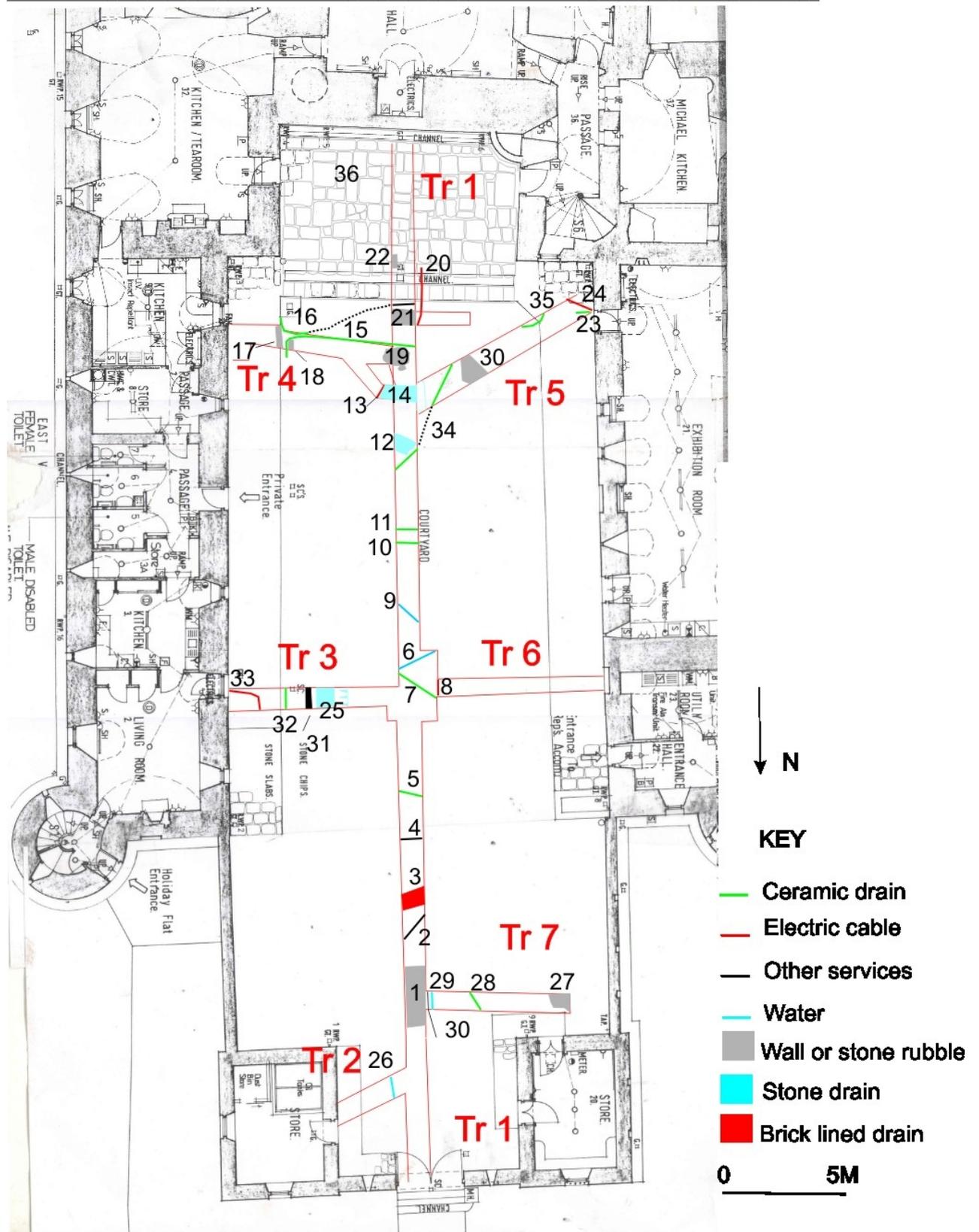
67-70	context 15
71-73	Walls looking NE
74-83	Sondage 2 section and details
84-85	Pipe cut by W side wall 10
86-94	Sondage 3 and details of context 16
95-102	General views of castle N approach, looking S

Appendix 2: Context data

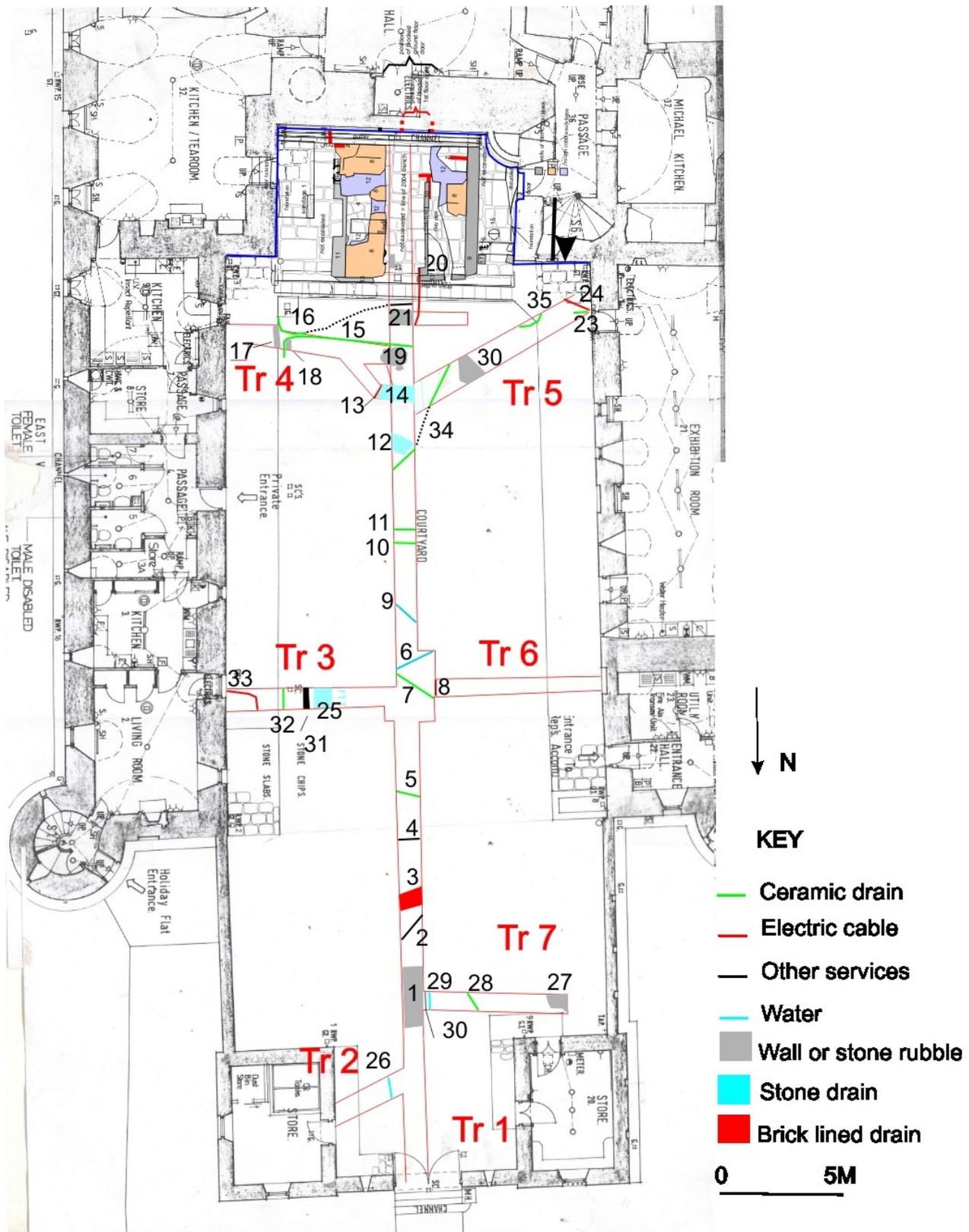
Context No	Description	Interpretation
1	Paving of large rectangular slabs	Paving possibly reused from the late 18 th and 19 th C stair block
2	130140mm yellow sand sub-base below paving	Modern/ 20 th C sub-base
3	c120mm grey sand below 2	Lower, possibly earlier sub-base
4	brown silty earth with much mortar and stone frags, c150mm, Side areas only	Trampled original surface in side passages with trample of rubble 7 on it
5	c 10mm mortar in spread c 1 x 0.5m just outside kitchen door	Possibly from mortaring when threshold raised. Between sub-base 2 and 3
6	Original threshold of kitchen door H130-180mm. Present threshold is a slatey	Original door height 2.10m

	slab c 140-150mm above the top of the earlier threshold	
7	Mortar, fragments broken stone, fragments of white plaster and occasional brick, thickest between walls 9 and 11 with smaller rubble to W of 9 and trampled to E of 11.	Rubble from demolition in mid 20 th C
8	Mortar floor base between walls 9 and 11, average c 80mm thick. Pale yellow, very hard with impressions of large rectangular slabs	Probably the paving stones originally used set on this surface and removed at time of demolition.
9	Wall, c 400mm wide with foundations projecting up to 100mm, Stones from large boulders to small and occasional slate for levelling with mortar bonding very like floor base 8	W wall of the first phase of the internal N stair. Late 18 th C.
10	Wall, c 340mm wide 3.4m long with break-through at 1.9m from N end	Foundation for W stair of the first phase of internal N stair. . Late 18 th C. Break is from pipe trench
11	Wall, 400mm wide. Structure as 9	E wall of the first phase of the internal N stair. Late 18 th C.
12	Rough cobbles/ rounded waterworn pebbles <150mm	Sub-base for mortar 8, although possibly remains of 17 th /18 th C surface

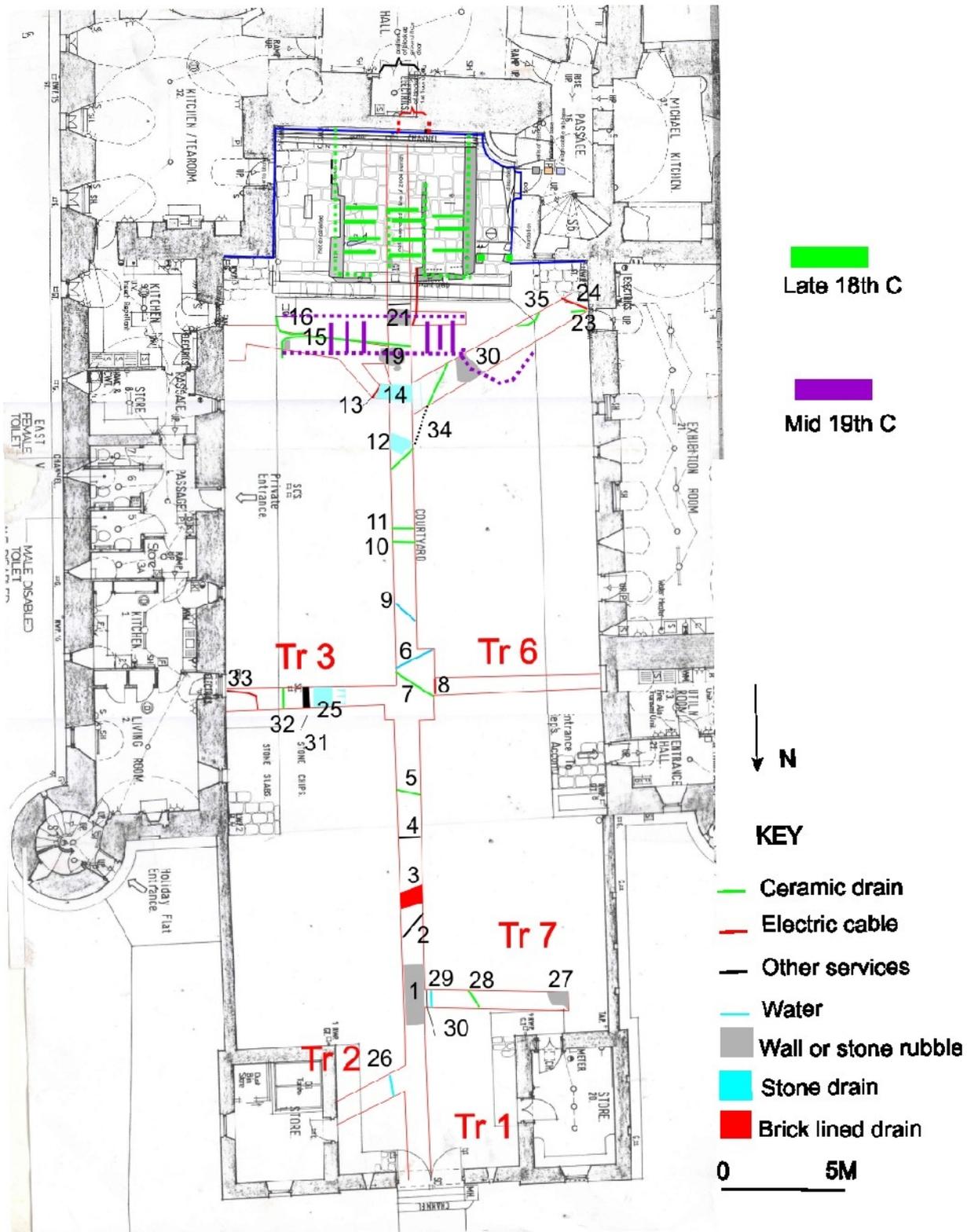
13	Wall, 200-250mm width surviving but this may be cut along N side by drainage gully	N wall of the first phase of the internal N stair. Late 18 th C. In 2 nd phase this became an internal wall with central doorway- possibly denoted by the break in 13
14	Only observed in Sondage 2 section. Clayey mortar with stones	Possibly rubble from 17 th /18 th C stairs – on and sealed by 4
15	Hole/disturbance 450 diam, 230mm deep into 4 and natural	
16	Small cut into natural and sealed by 4 in Sondage 3. Appeard to run below edge of wall 9. Diam 500mm, 180mm deep. Fill dark sticky peaty soil	Possibly early feature but no clear function or dating evidence
17	Stone 350 x 280 x 200. Blue grey granite with mortar on top surface and mortared to outside of wall 9. A few similar but loose slabs to W, beside castle wall	Base of E side of archway of the first phase of the internal N stair



Illus 24 2004 plan showing paving removed in 2011



Illus 25 2004 plan with 2011 plan superimposed



Illus 26 Detail of 2004 and 2011 plans with interpretation of traces of 18th and 19th-century struct

