

**PITSLIGO CASTLE**  
**ROSEHEARTY**  
**ABERDEENSHIRE**  
**-TEST PITS-**



**- Excavation and Recording of Test Pits -**  
April 2010

by  
**Murray Archaeological Services Ltd**



**Report No: MAS 2010-09**

by  
**H K & J C Murray**

H K Murray BA, PhD, MIFA, FSA Scot  
J C Murray BA, MIFA, FSA Scot, FMA  
Hill of Belnagoak, Methlick, Ellon, Aberdeenshire AB41 7JN  
Telephone: (01651) 806394 e-mail: cmurray@btinternet.com

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**Test Pits**

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**1 Background**

- 1.1 The Pitsligo Castle Trust and the Friends of Pitsligo were set up to repair the castle ruins over a number of years and make them safe for visitors.
- 1.2 Prior to the commencement of the first phase of the project to restore Pitsligo Castle, Aberdeenshire, the Pitsligo Castle Trust had been advised by the Archaeology Service of Aberdeenshire Council and Historic Scotland that engineering test pits to evaluate the foundations of the N range walls should be hand dug by archaeologists.
- 1.3 Murray Archaeological Services Ltd was commissioned by the Pitsligo Castle Trust and the work was undertaken on 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> April 2010.

**2. The Site**

- 2.1 The site is located some 500m S of the coast and c300m SE of the burgh of Rosehearty.

NGR: NJ 93732 66942. Parish: Pitsligo

NMRS No: NJ96NW7 Scheduled Monument Index No.6146

**3. Historical background**

- 3.1 Pitsligo consists of a large roofless courtyard castle dating mainly from the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries but with 17<sup>th</sup> century additions and alterations.

It was the home of the Forbes family for some 300 years until the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745. As the Forbes family had supported the return of the Stewarts to the British throne, government troops destroyed the castle in 1746 after the battle of Culloden.

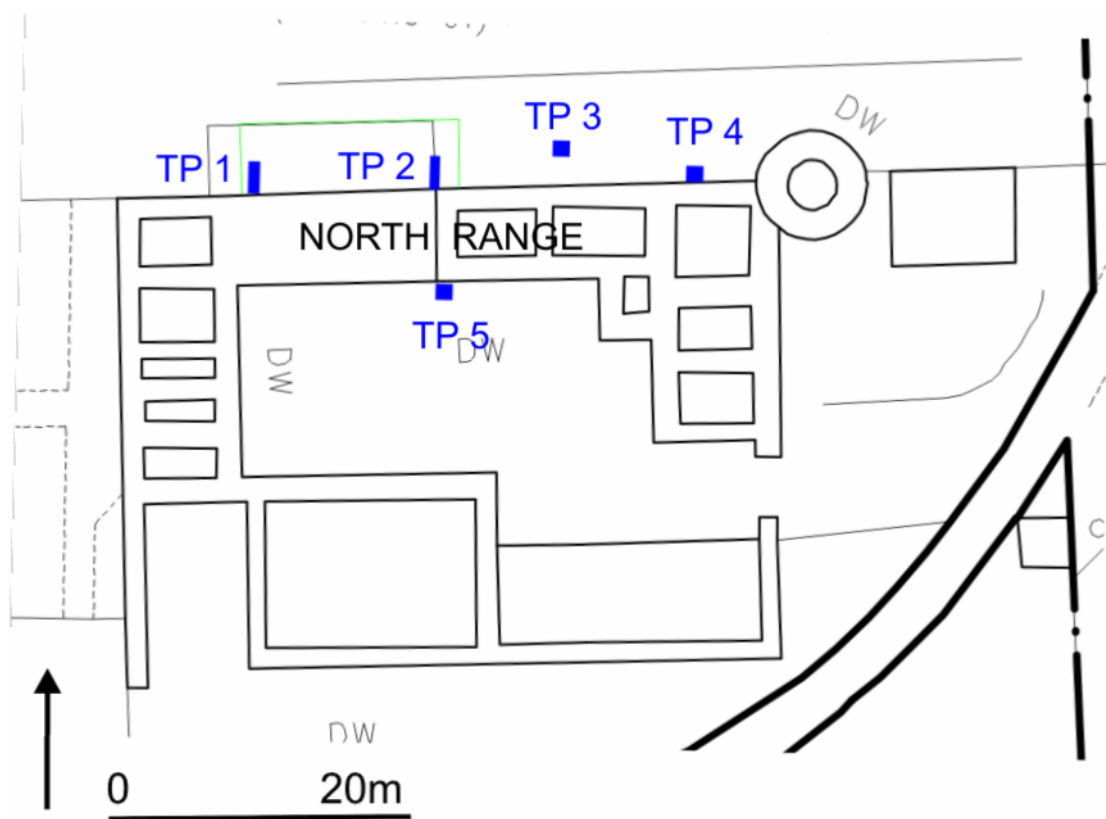
Alexander 4<sup>th</sup> Lord Forbes of Pitsligo was outlawed and lost his lands. It was sold first

to the Gardens of Troup and later repurchased by Sir William Forbes in 1771/80. The castle was never restored but a farmhouse was built utilising the ruins of the W end of the N range and this was occupied until the mid 20<sup>th</sup> C.

#### 4 Methodology

4.1 A total of five test pits (TPs) were dug, four on the N side of the N range outer wall (Nos 1-4) and one within the courtyard on the S side of the S wall of the N range. The positions of the test pits were supplied by Steve Wood, Senior Engineer with David Narro Associates, the Consulting Structural and Civil Engineers. A sixth test pit, originally intended to be within the courtyard, was not undertaken after discussion with Steve Wood. The aim of the test pits was to investigate the depth of the wall foundations of the N range and to find out what they were built on.

All the pits were hand dug by Murray Archaeological Services Ltd. Test pits 1-4 were examined by Envirosol Technologies Ltd who took samples of the natural materials.



Illus 1 Location of test pits (blue). Green line is position of buttressing

## 5 Test pits

### Test pit 1

*Location:* At right angles to the N face of the N wall of the N range, between 8.65m and 9.45m from the NW corner of the building, extending between the wall face and the face of the concrete foundation of the scaffolding buttress. The wall face included a drain outlet through the wall.

*Size:* 2.18m N-S x 700mm E-W.

*Results:* The main wall extended only 180mm below the present surface and was built directly on natural, the drain outlet extended to 280mm below the present surface, being cut c 100mm into the natural – this cut had been made to accommodate the side stones of the drain and only extended c 100 mm away from the face of the wall. The drain itself was partially blocked with rubble and silt.

400mm away from the wall face the natural appeared to have been cut down c 100mm. At the N end of the test pit there was a machine cut 500mm deep dug to insert the concrete base of the buttresses. The concrete was c 400mm to the base, with a slight additional depth where the concrete had extended under the shuttering when it was poured. The machine cut had been backfilled with rubble and topsoil.

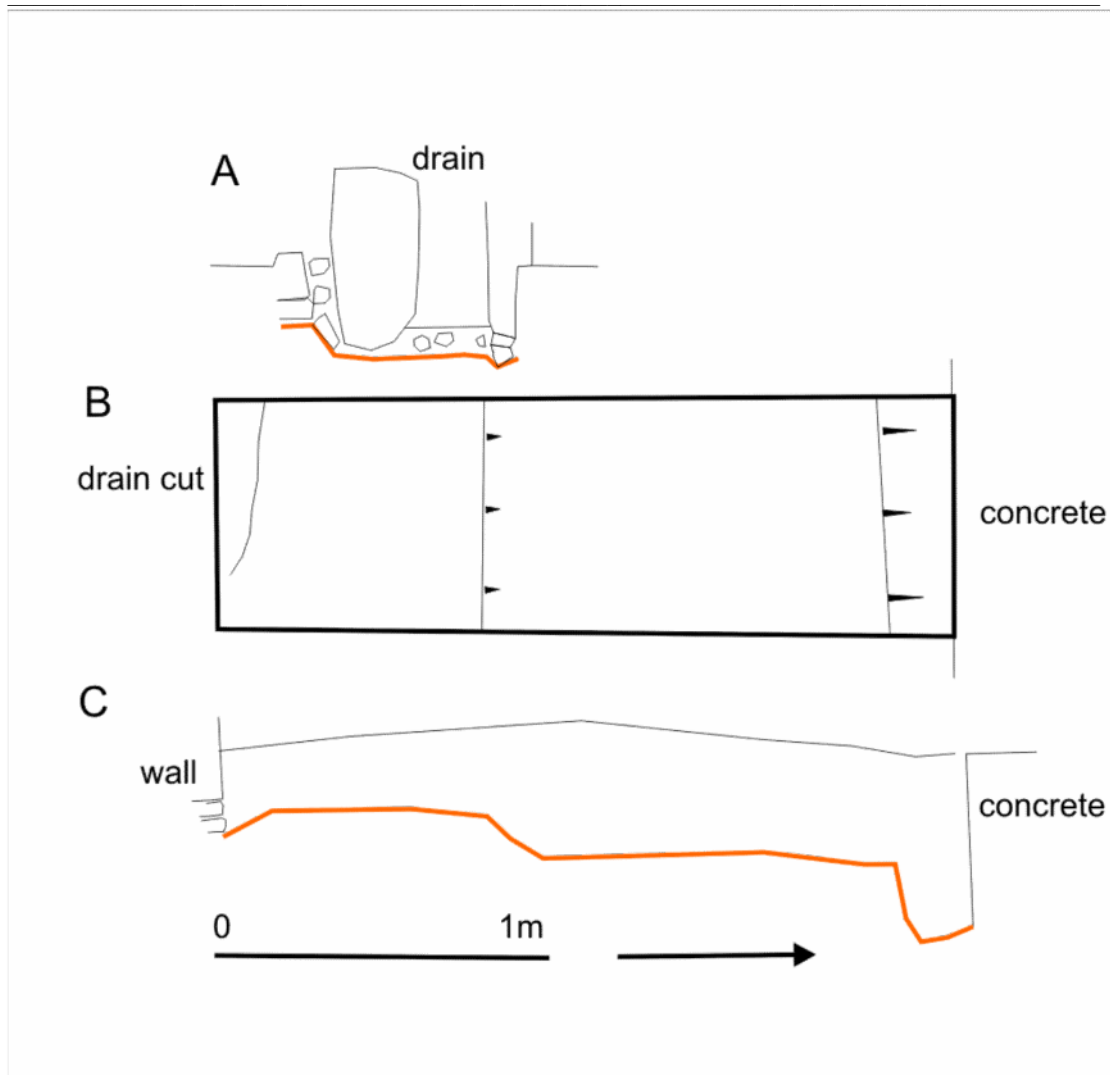
*Soil profile:* 200-350mm of topsoil with rubble, mortar, slate and pantile fragments over natural. In this test pit natural was rock.

Levels on natural (All levels are related to the established temporary datum set in the grass outside the W face of castle)

Natural S end TP 1 by wall: D-1.39

Natural N end TP 1 at edge of cut for concrete: D-1.68





Illus 2 TP 1 A: Elevation of drain/wall, B: plan, C: W section (orange = natural)



Illus 3 TP 1 location



Illus 4 TP 1 looking S



Illus 5 TP 1 detail of wall base and drain





**Illus 6 TP 1 detail of buttress base**

### Test pit 2

*Location:* At right angles to the N face of the N wall of the N range, between 20.8 and 21.4m from the NW corner of the building, extending between the wall face and the face of the concrete foundation of the scaffolding buttress. The wall face included a drain outlet through the wall.

*Size:* 2.10m N-S x 600mm E-W.

*Results:* The main wall extended only 160mm below the present surface and was built directly on natural with some crushed stone and mortar (construction surface) below the base stones. The drain outlet extended to c 300mm below the present surface, being cut c 150mm into the natural – this cut, made to accommodate the side stones of the drain, did not extend away from the face of the wall. The drain itself was partially blocked with rubble and silt – as this rubble was loose it was not cut right back to the wall face.

400mm away from the wall face the natural appeared to have been cut down c 200mm. At the N end of the test pit there was a machine cut 450-500mm deep dug to insert the concrete base of the buttresses. The concrete was c 400mm to the base, with a slight additional depth where the concrete had extended under the shuttering when it

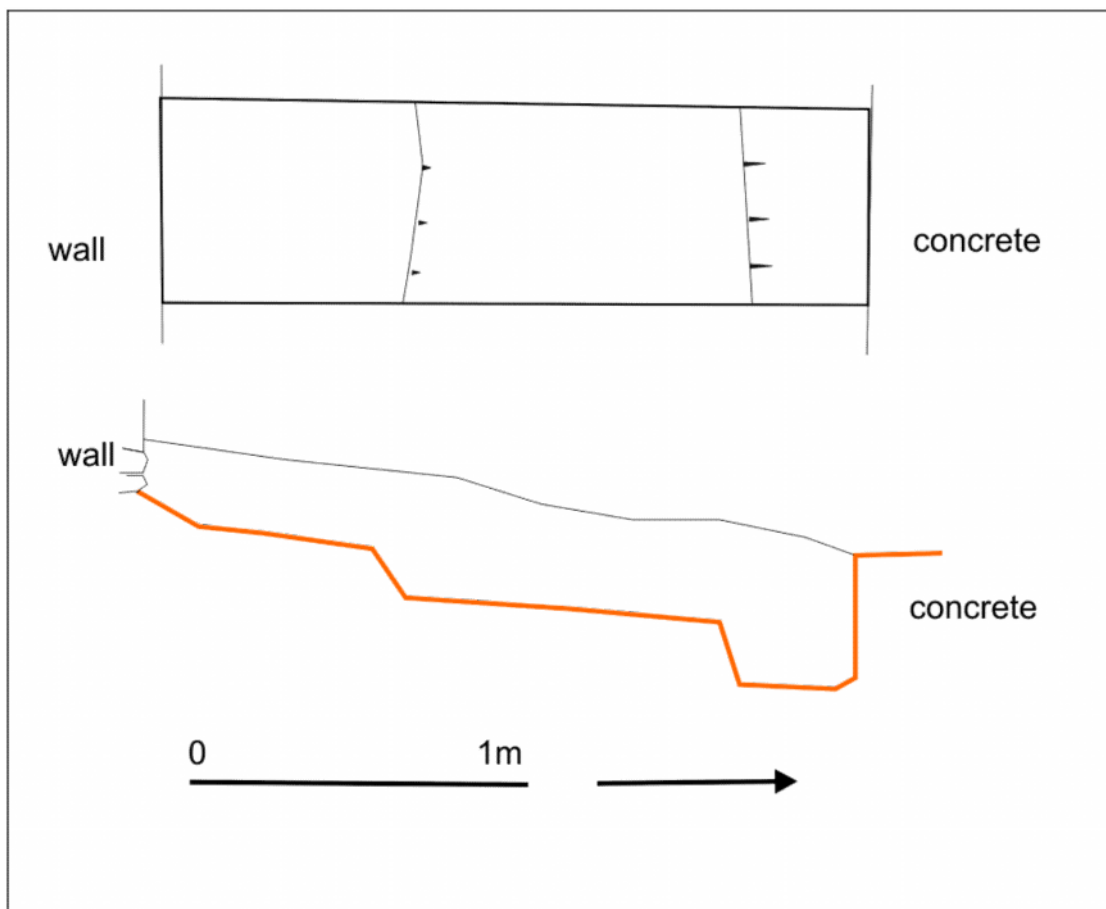
was poured. The machine cut had been backfilled with rubble (including timber) and topsoil.

*Soil profile:* 200-350mm of topsoil with rubble, mortar, slate and pantile fragments over natural. In this test pit natural was compact yellow boulder clay.

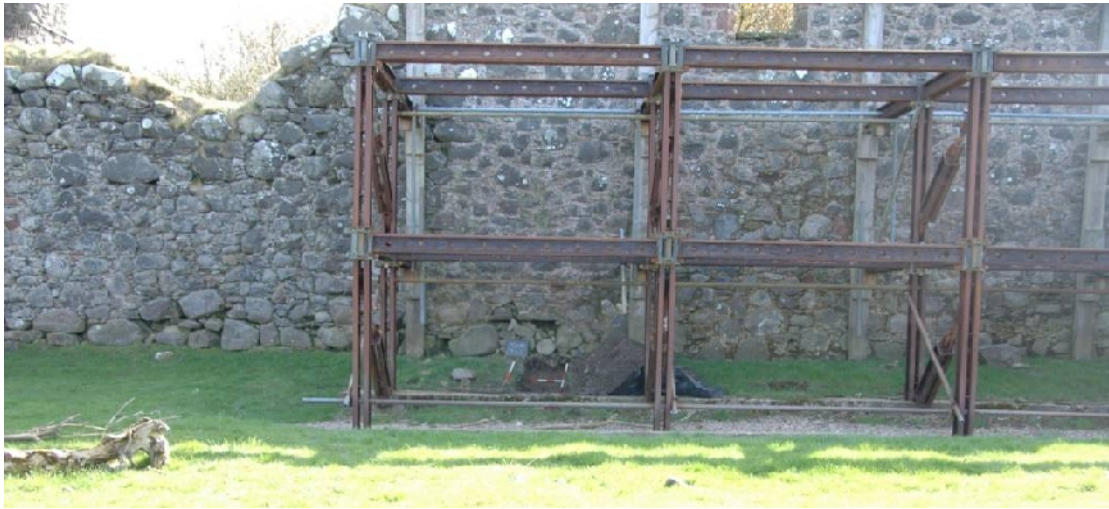
Levels on natural (All levels are related to the established temporary datum set in the grass outside the W face of castle)

Natural S end TP 2 by wall: D-1.43

Natural N end TP 2 at edge of cut for concrete: D-1.74



Illus 7 TP 2 Plan and W elevation (orange = natural)



**Illus 8 TP 2 location**



**Illus 9 TP 2 looking S**





**Illus 10 TP 2 detail of wall base**



**Illus 11 TP 2 detail of buttress base**

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### Test pit 3

*Location:* At right angles to the N face of the N wall of the N range, between 28.8 and 29.8m from the NW corner of the building. This test pit was offset 1.9m from the face of the wall.

*Size:* 1m square.

*Results:* Rubble on to natural.

*Soil profile:* 480-500mm of very stoney rubble, mortar and slate directly down to the top of natural. In this test pit natural was compact yellow boulder clay.

Levels on natural (All levels are related to the established temporary datum set in the grass outside the W face of castle)

Natural at centre TP 3: D- 2.10



**Illus 12 TP 3 location**



**Illus 13 TP 3 detail**

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Test pit 4

*Location:* At right angles to the N face of the N wall of the N range, between 37.4 and 38.4m from the NW corner of the building, extending N from the wall face. It was 3.3m from the junction between the round tower and the N wall and c. 2m E of the E side of the blocked door (and window) below the gallery stair. It was also 1.85m W of the vertical break of build which would appear to be the end of the original N courtyard wall (the wall between this and the round tower being presumably infill when the tower was built). This should therefore illustrate the foundations of the main section of this N wall.

*Size:* 1m square.

*Results:* Two of the wall foundation course boulders were exposed, they extended 100-150mm below the present surface. The gap between the boulders was packed with small filler stones. The W foundation boulder was directly on natural boulder clay. The front (N) face of the E boulder was on 100-120mm of disturbed boulder clay with some mortar fragments – this is likely to be the construction surface. It merged into undisturbed natural boulder clay.

The natural boulder clay sloped gently down to the N.

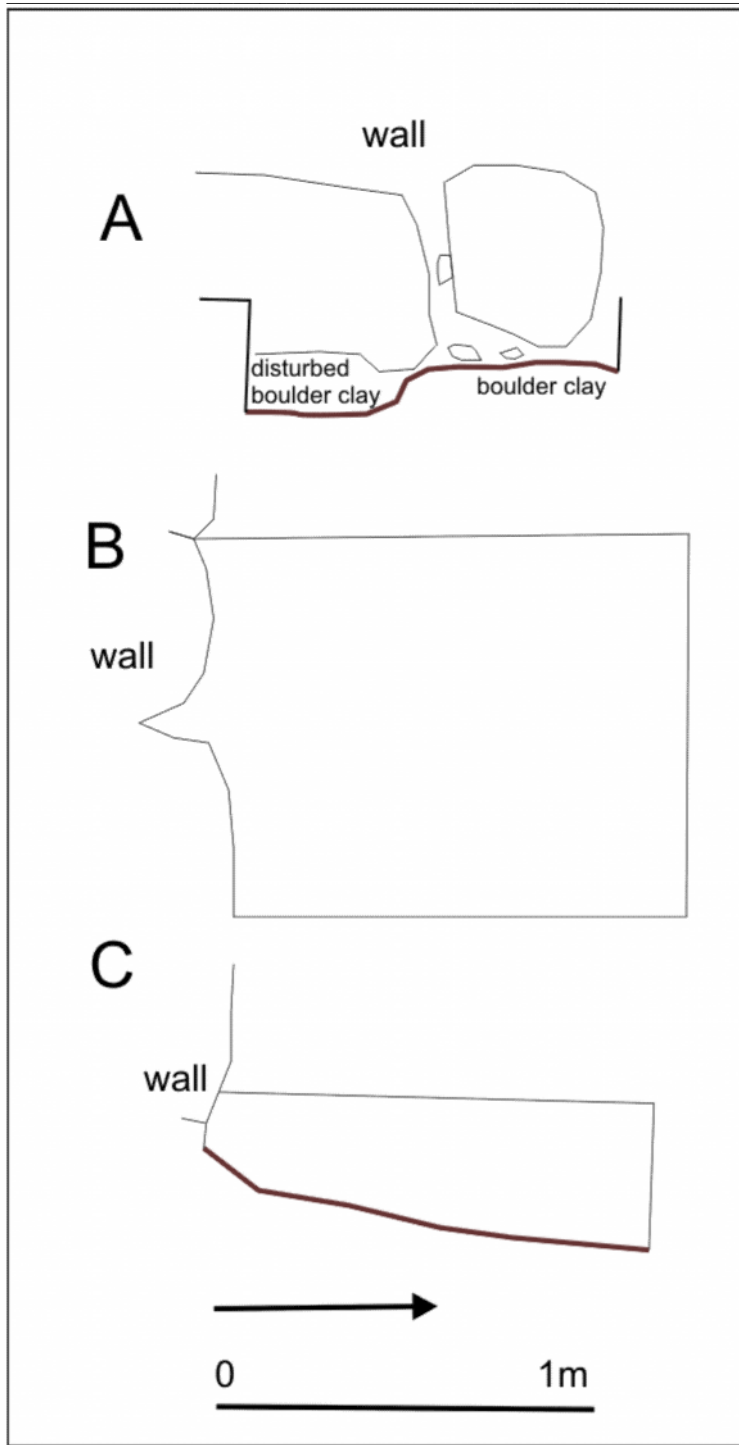
*Soil profile:* 120-380mm of topsoil over natural. Only the top c 100mm of topsoil contained rubble. In this test pit natural was compact yellow boulder clay.

Levels on natural (All levels are related to the established temporary datum set in the grass outside the W face of castle)

Natural S end TP 4 by wall: D-1.53

Natural N end TP 4: D-1.78





Illus 14 TP 4 A: elevation wall, B: plan, C: W section (brown=natural)



**Illus 15 TP 4 location**



**Illus 16 TP 4 looking S**





**Illus 17 TP 4 detail of wall base**



**Illus 18 TP 4 W section**

*Archaeological Interpretation of Test pits 1-4 outside the N wall of the N range*

The N wall of the N range is considered to have been the original N courtyard wall, reutilised in the 17<sup>th</sup> century when the N range was added comprising guest chambers

at ground floor with a gallery above. The very shallow foundations are consistent with its original use as a courtyard wall.

The shallow cut into the natural c 400mm from the wall face, which was observed in Test pits 1 and 2, may have been part of the garden terracing. It was not observed in Test pit 4 but this may be because TP 4 was to the E of the now blocked entrance to the garden from the passage beside the stair to the gallery. In this context it may be significant that in test pits 1-3 the rubble was down to the top of natural, suggesting little or no original soil below the rubble. In Test Pit 4 rubble was only in the upper c100mm of the topsoil.



**Illus 19 Looking W along N wall N range, TPs 4 and 3 in foreground**

Test pit 5

*Location:* Inside the courtyard at right angles to the S face of the S wall of the N range, 430mm W of the W jamb of the doorway of the second guest chamber from the E.

*Size:* 1m square

*Results:* Before excavation the yard surface was of irregular stone cobbles with one larger stone that appeared to be part of a line of larger stones running parallel to the S wall of the N range.

When this upper surface was removed, two sections of 6" clay drain were exposed running E-W. Below these were carefully set overlapping clay pantiles which possibly

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formed an earlier drain base. These were all set within an earlier stone drain. The stone drain which was 200-240mm wide internally was well built with up to 3 courses of mortared stone surviving to 400mm depth. It ran below the line of the larger stones noted in the yard surface which appear to have been the original capstones. Within TP 5 these had been partially removed when the clay pipes were put in. However, TP 5 was extended by 350mm to the E to test that the drain ran below the very large threshold stone of the guest chamber doorway. It is worth noting that the capstone next to the threshold runs below the S wall of the N range, indicating that the construction of the stone drain almost certainly pre-dates the construction of the N range accommodation- although possibly only as different stages in the building process.

The base of the drain was cut to natural boulder clay so it appears probable that this also underlies the N range S wall. However this was difficult to test as the N wall of the drain and the S side of the N range S wall had a gap of only 10-50mm between them. This gap was packed with small angular stones so it was decided to remove some of these to look at the N range wall without moving or damaging the drain wall which would possibly weaken the base of the range wall. This showed that the S wall of the N range at this point extends 1 ½ courses (c 400mm) below the present yard (and threshold) level. At the base of the lowest course there appeared to be some small angular stones- these may be on the natural but this could not be established without damage to the wall. Natural boulder clay at the base of the drain is c 500mm below the top of the threshold (although the base of the drain may have been slightly cut in or eroded).

*Soil profile:* The presence of the drain beside the wall obscures the base of the wall but the natural in this area is boulder clay seen at the base of the drain near to the level of the base of the wall.

Levels on natural (All levels are related to the established temporary datum set in the grass outside the W face of castle)

Natural at base of stone drain E end of TP 5: D-1.01

Natural at base of stone drain W end of TP 5: D-1.02

#### *Archaeological Interpretation of Test pit 5 inside the courtyard*

The stone drain in TP 5 appears to run along the S side of the S wall of the N range below a series of large capstones. At least one of the capstones runs below the range



wall suggesting that the drain was constructed before the wall. However the very large capstone next to TP 5, which also acts as a threshold for one of the guest chambers, perhaps suggests that the drain and the wall were part of the same episode of construction – perhaps the drain would have collected roof drip and rainwater from the courtyard and prevented it flowing into the guest chambers. This makes more sense than a drain at this position *before* the present N range was built (although there may of course have been wooden buildings pre-dating the N range). A further piece of evidence to link the drain with the construction of the N range is the drain culvert through the base of the wall of the small chamber beneath the stair to the N range gallery. Levels suggest that the flow of water was from E to W, in which case this may have been an outflow related to the stone spout that seems to have taken water into this small chamber. The partial re-use of the drain with the clay pipes and tiles relates to the re-use of part of the NW corner of the castle as a farmhouse until the 1930s.

It would be worth planning the original drainage system indicated by the capstones- and attempting to see if this drain linked to the outflows in each of the guest chambers (as seen in the N wall of the N range in TPs 1 and 2).

The re-use of part of the drain with clay pipes can be linked to the farmhouse in the 19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> century.



**Illus 20 TP 5 location**



**Illus 21 TP 5 clay drain**



**Illus 22 TP 5 stone drain looking W**



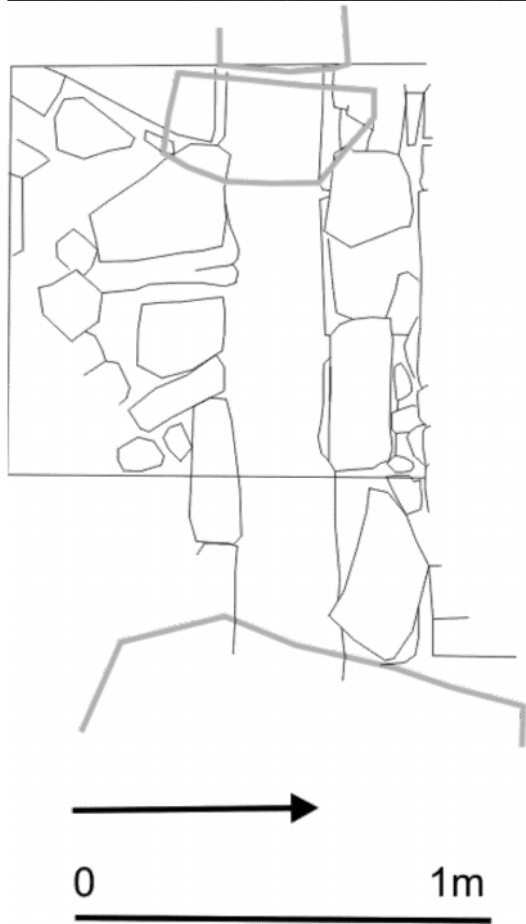


**Illus 23 TP 5 stone drain looking E showing capstones extending to drain outlet from stair tower**



**Illus 24 TP 5 showing detail of base of S wall of N range and infill between it and the N side of the stone drain**





**Illus 25 TP 5, plan of stone drain with surviving capstones in thick grey (threshold to door of chamber at bottom of plan)**

### **Appendix 1: Catalogue of photographs**

<b>Digital frame no</b>	<b>Subject</b>
001-002	Location TP 1
003-010	TP 1 looking S
011-012	TP 1 Detail cut for drain
013—14	TP 1 W section
015-017	TP 1 detail of buttress foundation
018-019	TP 1 looking SW
020-021	TP 2 location
022-023	TP 2 looking S
024-025	TP 2 close up of base of wall and drain cut

026-027	TP 2 looking S
028-029	TP 2 W section
030-031	TP 2 buttress foundation
032-033	TP 1
034-035	TP 3 location
036-038	TP 3 detail looking S
039-041	TP3 looking W
042-043	TP 4 location
044-045	TP4 looking S
046-047	TP4 detail of base of wall
048-049	TP 4 W section
050-051	General view of N wall N range, looking W, showing all TP s
052-054	TP 5 Yard surface before excavation, with planning frame (1m square)
055-057	TP 5 location
058	TP 5 yard surface
059-060	TP 5 yard surface to W of TP 5 showing cap stones
061-063	TP 5 clay pipe in drain
064-066	TP 4 Soil investigation cut through boulder clay
067-069	TP 3 Soil investigation cut through boulder clay
070-073	TP 2 Soil investigation cut through boulder clay
074-076	TP 1 Soil investigation cut through rock
077-080	TP 5 Stone drain looking N
081-084	TP 5 stone drain looking W
085-086	TP 5 stone drain looking E with capstones leading to drain outlet from base of stair tower
087-088	TP 5 stone drain looking E , running below threshold of door
089-090	TP 5. As 086
091-092	TP 5 detail of drain below threshold
093-094	TP 5 Detail of infill between N side of drain and the S face of the S wall of N range

095-096	TP 5 Detail of base of the S face of the S wall of N range
097	TP 5 As 094