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**CASTLE FRASER  
ABERDEENSHIRE  
LIGHTENING CONDUCTOR REPLACEMENT  
-Archaeological Watching Brief-**

**H K Murray and JC Murray**

**1. Background**

- 1.1 Renewal of some lightning conductors at Castle Fraser, Cluny, Aberdeenshire required the excavation of trenches at a number of points around the perimeter of the castle. As a result an archaeological watching brief was carried out during the excavation of the trenches and to record any archaeological features that might be revealed.
- 1.2 The watching brief was undertaken in the context of the possibility of features relating to either the castle buildings including the 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings that formerly stood within the courtyard and the associated gardens.
- 1.3 Murray Archaeological Services Ltd was commissioned by the National Trust for Scotland to undertake the work. The field element was carried out on 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> September 2011 prior to the insertion of the lightning conductors.

**2. The Site**

- 2.1 Parish: Cluny NGR: NJ 7227 1257  
NMRS ref: NJ71SW.6 Aberdeenshire SMR ref: NJ71SW0006

**3 Methodology**

- 3.1 A total of seven lightning conductors (LC) needed replacement (illus 18). Four (LC 3, 6, 11, 12) were in areas of hard standing and were partially excavated by a mini- digger with hand excavation of all archaeological features. Two (LC 1 and 2) were in the grass to the E of the E wing; these were de-turfed by hand and then excavated by a mini- digger with hand excavation of all archaeological features. The final conductor (LC 5) was to be placed on the N side of the main block of the castle within the area excavated by MAS Ltd in March 2011 prior to replacement of paving slabs (Murray and

Murray 2011 MAS 2011-3). After discussions with Dr Shannon Fraser, Archaeologist for the National Trust for Scotland, it was agreed that as this area had been excavated and recorded no further archaeological intervention was necessary.

All trenches were planned and photographed by MAS Ltd.

#### **4. The Results**

##### **4.1 Lightening conductor trench 1 (LC 1)**

Between 3.3m and 4.3m from the outer SE corner of the E wing and between 1m and 2m from the outer face of the E wall of the E wing. 1m square and 450-500mm deep.

Some 200mm of sod and topsoil (1) lay over c 300mm of buried garden soil (2) above natural glacial deposits (3). Contexts 2 and 3 were cut by a trench 400mm wide for a plastic drain pipe (4), the top of which was c 450mm below the surface of the grass.

##### *Interpretation*

The buried garden soil (2) was very similar to the garden soils recorded during the excavation of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Privy Garden (Murray and Murray 2010 MAS 2010-18). It appears most likely that this would have been within the border apparent between the path and the wall of the castle (illus 3).



**Illus 1 Position LC 1**



**Illus 2 Detail LC 1**



**Illus 3 Approximate positions of trenches LC1 and 2 in relation to the 17<sup>th</sup> century Privy Garden as shown on 1799 Estate Plan ©Copyright Aberdeen University. Reproduced with permission.**

#### 4.2 Lightening conductor trench 2(LC 2)

Between 6.8 and 7.8m from the junction of the E wall of the E wing and the NE turret and between 1m and 2m from the outer face of the E wall of the E wing. 1m square and 500mm deep. This trench lay just to the S of trench 1 of the 2010 excavation (Murray and Murray 2010 MAS 2010-18)

Some 150mm of sod and topsoil (1) lay over c 300mm of yellower slightly sandy humic soil (2) above c100mm redeposited natural sand (3). Below 3 there was a thin irregular layer of small stones and charcoal (4).

#### *Interpretation*

The lack of the 17<sup>th</sup> century garden soil and the rather disturbed nature of the fill suggests that this may have been previously dug out – possibly for a planting hole associated with the border shown along this area in the 19<sup>th</sup> century on photographs and early OS maps.

#### 4.3 Lightening conductor trench 3(LC 3)

Trench 1.3 x 2m with the long axis at right angles to the inner face of the E wall of the courtyard and directly beside the stone paving slabs on the E side of the yard.

When the gravel was removed the foundations of a very substantial stone wall were discovered lying along the N side of the trench. The top of the wall was cleaned and a trench for the lightening conductor dug alongside it to the S.

The wall (3), which was only sealed by c100mm gravel make-up, was cut to a total depth of 300-420mm into the natural glacial gravels (4) and possibly into a layer of dirty sand with mortar fragments, 1 brick and occasional slate (2) ( although there was some ambiguity and this may have built up against it). Layer 2 extended below the paving and may represent construction related to the 19<sup>th</sup> century gallery alongside the inner face of the E wing.

The wall foundation was 650-700mm wide and c2m was exposed running E/W at right angles to the upstanding courtyard wall. A scar c 500mm wide in the upstanding N/S wall in line with the foundation suggests that both were walls of the same structure, the E wall of which was retained as the yard wall. Further confirmation of this can be seen in the difference between the predominantly red and yellowish stones in this wall compared with grey granite used in the infill of a gap between it and the main wall of the E wing (illus 5). Alternate stones in the scar on the face of the wall show rough dressing marks where the through stones of the corner had been cut back when the S wall of the structure was reduced to the foundation revealed in the excavation.



**Illus 4 Detail of wall (3) in LC 3**



**Illus 5 LC 3 in relation to the courtyard wall. Ranging rod stands on line of scar. Grey infilling stones to RHS of scar**

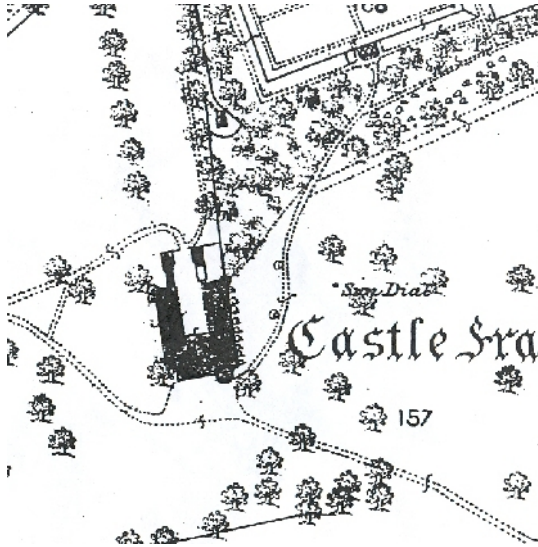
### *Interpretation*

The position of this wall and its relationship to the E yard wall suggest that both were part of a rectangular building shown at the position on the the 1<sup>st</sup> edition OS map of 1864 and on an estate map dated either 1816 or 1846. A fragment of clay-bonded wall foundation found during a watching brief on drains undertaken by MAS Ltd ( Murray 2010 MAS 2010-24) may have been part of the same structure but appears to be just outside the wall line by an entrance – it may be a related feature such as a step or may be part of an earlier structure.

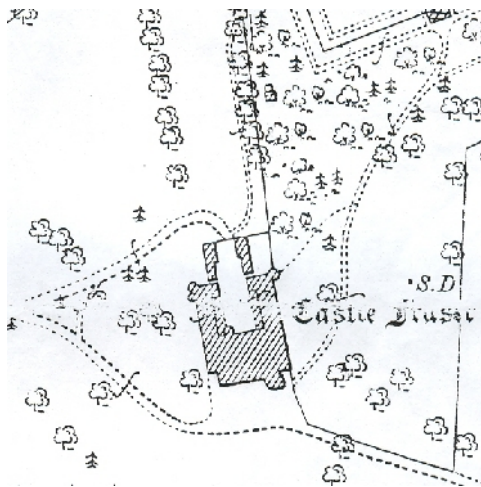
The building, which would have an external width of c 4m and a length of c 8m according to the map evidence, is first shown on the 1816 (or 1846) plan . It does not appear c 1831 on the print of the N end of the castle by C J Hullmandel. By the first OS map of 1864 it appears to be unroofed but was still extant on the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of 1899. It is shown on the 1923 ground plan of the castle drawn by Lorimer (illus 10). The gap between the building and the main E wing is shown as a doorway.



**Illus 6 The position of the wall in LC 3 in relation to the wall found in 2010 which is marked by horizontal ranging rod.**



Illus 7 Detail from 1<sup>st</sup> OS map 1864



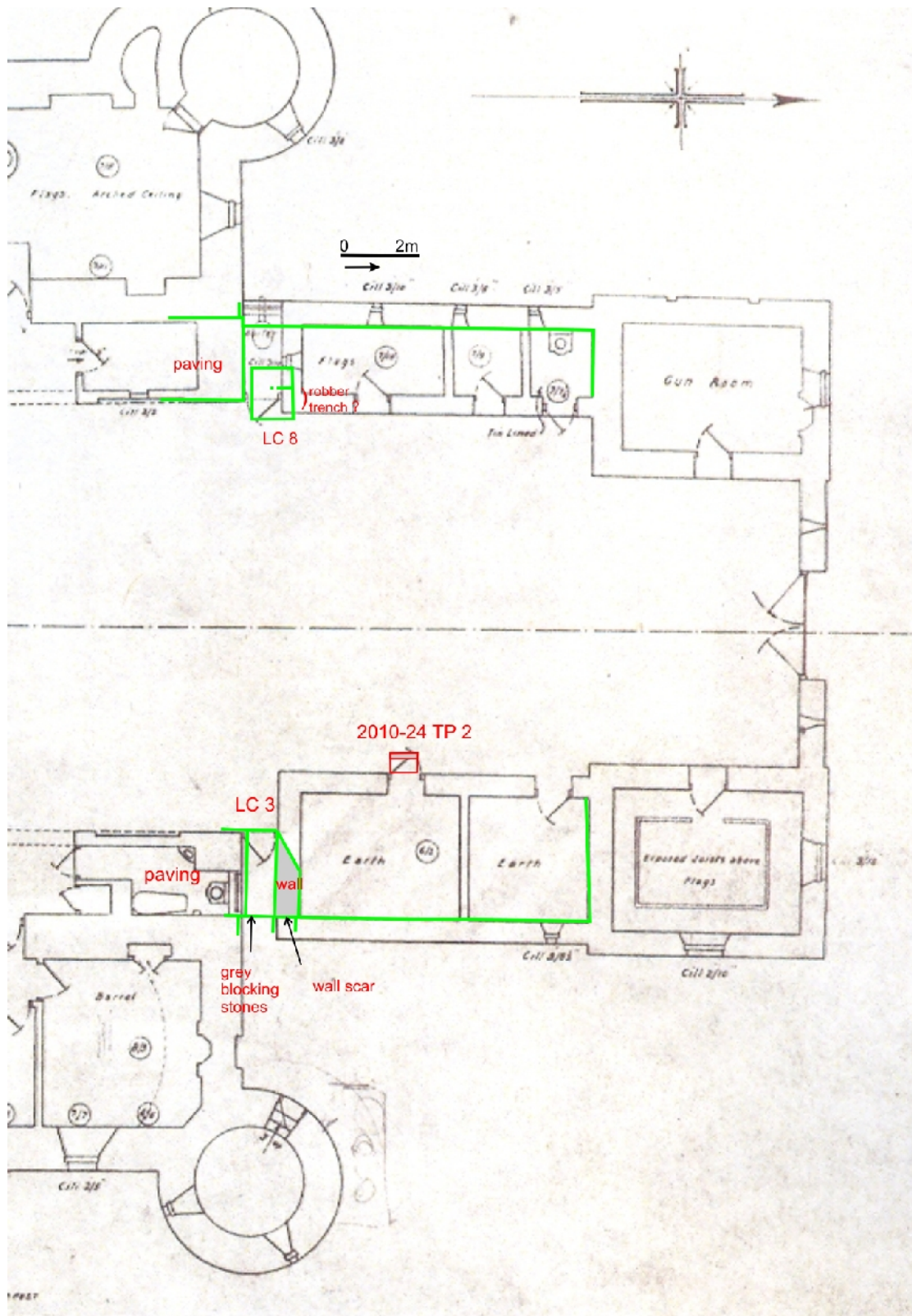
Illus 8 2nd edition OS map 1899

#### 4.4 Lightening conductor trench 5 (LC 5)

LC 5 was within the area of the excavation undertaken in March 2011 so no further archaeological recording was necessary.



Illus 9 LC 5.



Illus 10 Detail of Lorrimer's ground plan of the castle in 1923 with trenches LC 3 and LC 8 superimposed in green. MAS 2010-24 trench TP 2 superimposed in red.



#### 4.5 Lightning conductor trench 8 (LC 8)

Trench LC8 was 1.3 x 1m with the long axis E/W at right angles to the inner face of the W wall of the courtyard and directly beside the stone paving slabs on the W side of the yard. Depth: 500-550mm.

Some 60-100mm of gravel (1) lay over a layer (2) of stone and mortar rubble. At the W end this was c230mm but extended down into a cut (3) at the E end with a maximum depth of 450mm. The cut was into hard yellow glacial sandy natural.



**Illus 11 LC 8, looking W. Arrow shows the edge of robber trench**

#### *Interpretation*

The cut (3) may be the robbed out wall line of a small building shown on the W side of the courtyard on the 1<sup>st</sup> edition OS map of 1864 and on an estate map dated either 1816 or 1846. It is still extant on the 1899 2<sup>nd</sup> OS map and is shown in detail on Lorimer's drawing of 1923 (illus 10). Although the supposed robber trench is only c 1.50m from the face of the existing wall, this building is shown on the Lorimer plan as only c 1.75m in internal width.

#### 4.6 Lightning conductor trench 11 (LC 11)

Trench LC 11 was 1m x 1m with an E/W extension c600 x 400mm dug to isolate and put a new tap on a water pipe. The trench was within the SW angle at the front of the

building between the square tower and the main block of the castle. Depth: 500-550mm.

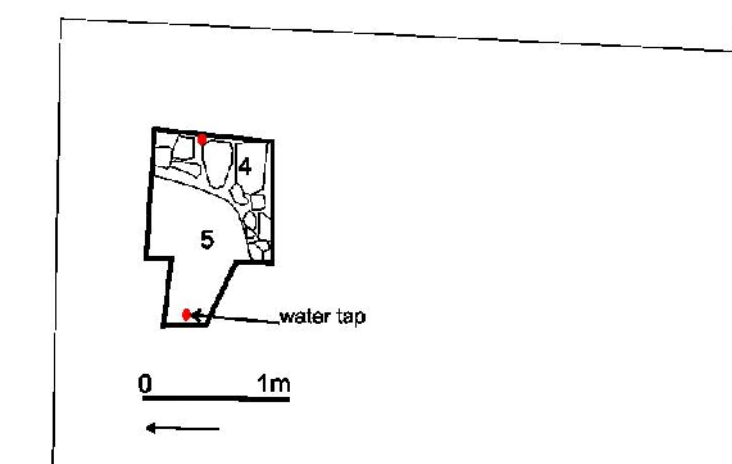
Below c 100mm gravel (1), there was an irregular layer of yellow sand (2) which appeared to be infill around an E/W water pipe. This was dug into a grey-brown gritty sand (3) which lay over a stone drain (4) cut into the natural yellow glacial natural (5). The drain appeared to run N/S from the S face of the square tower and then curved around to the W. The top was much disturbed by both the water pipe and by the original lightning conductor rod and it was collapsed. However it appeared to have capstones with some mortar on them resting on side stones with a void between. The full width was not exposed and the capstones were not removed.



**Illus 12 Position of LC11**



**Illus 13 LC11 looking W**



**Illus 14 Plan of LC 11 (red is water pipe)**

### *Interpretation*

The drain may be one of those mentioned in the garden Day Book for June 30<sup>th</sup> 1796 and July 1-12<sup>th</sup> and again on 14<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> July 1796 when work was being done on drains 'befor Castle'.

### 4.7 Lightening conductor trench 12 (LC 12)

Trench LC 12 was 1m x 1.7m with the long axis N/S at right angles to the outer face of the S wall of the main block of the castle, with the NE corner of the trench 1m S of the castle wall and 1m W of its junction with the round tower. Depth 250mm.

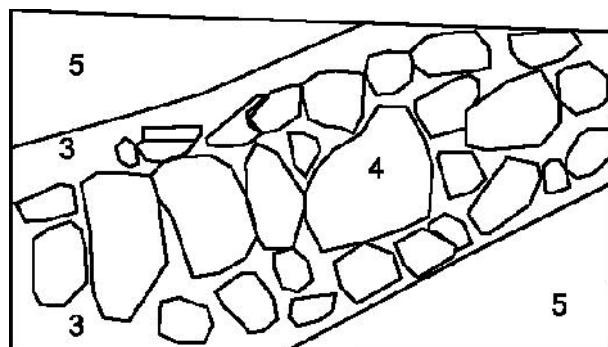
Below c50mm of gravel (1) there was a slightly brown humic sand (2) above natural (5). Both appeared to have been cut by a stone drain (4) which had a deposit of fine grey silt (3) directly over it. The drain runs NNW/SSE across the trench and 1.75m length was exposed. The width of the drain cut was 700mm. It appeared to have capstones resting on stone lined sides. No capstones were removed. There had been some disturbance by the original lightening conductor which had been driven through the drain.



**Illus 15** Position of LC 12



**Illus 16** LC 12 looking N



0 1m



Illus 17 Plan LC 12

*Interpretation*

The drain may be one of those mentioned in the garden Day Book for June 30<sup>th</sup> 1796 and July 1-12<sup>th</sup> and again on 14<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> July 1796 when work was being done on drains 'befor Castle'.

**5. Conclusions**

Of the seven lightning conductors that needed replacement, one trench was into an area excavated in March 2011. Of the remaining six, four had significant archaeology- with drains of probable late 18<sup>th</sup> century date on the S side of the castle and foundations of two 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings revealed in the courtyard.

Photographs supplied to archive on CD

Photographic catalogue Castle Fraser lightning conductor trenches	
Digital frame no	Content
1	Position LC12
2-7	Details LC 12
8-13	Details LC 1
14-15	Position LC1
16-21	Details LC2
22-24	Position LC 2
25-30	Details LC 2
31-47	LC 3
48-52	LC 5
53-57	LC 8

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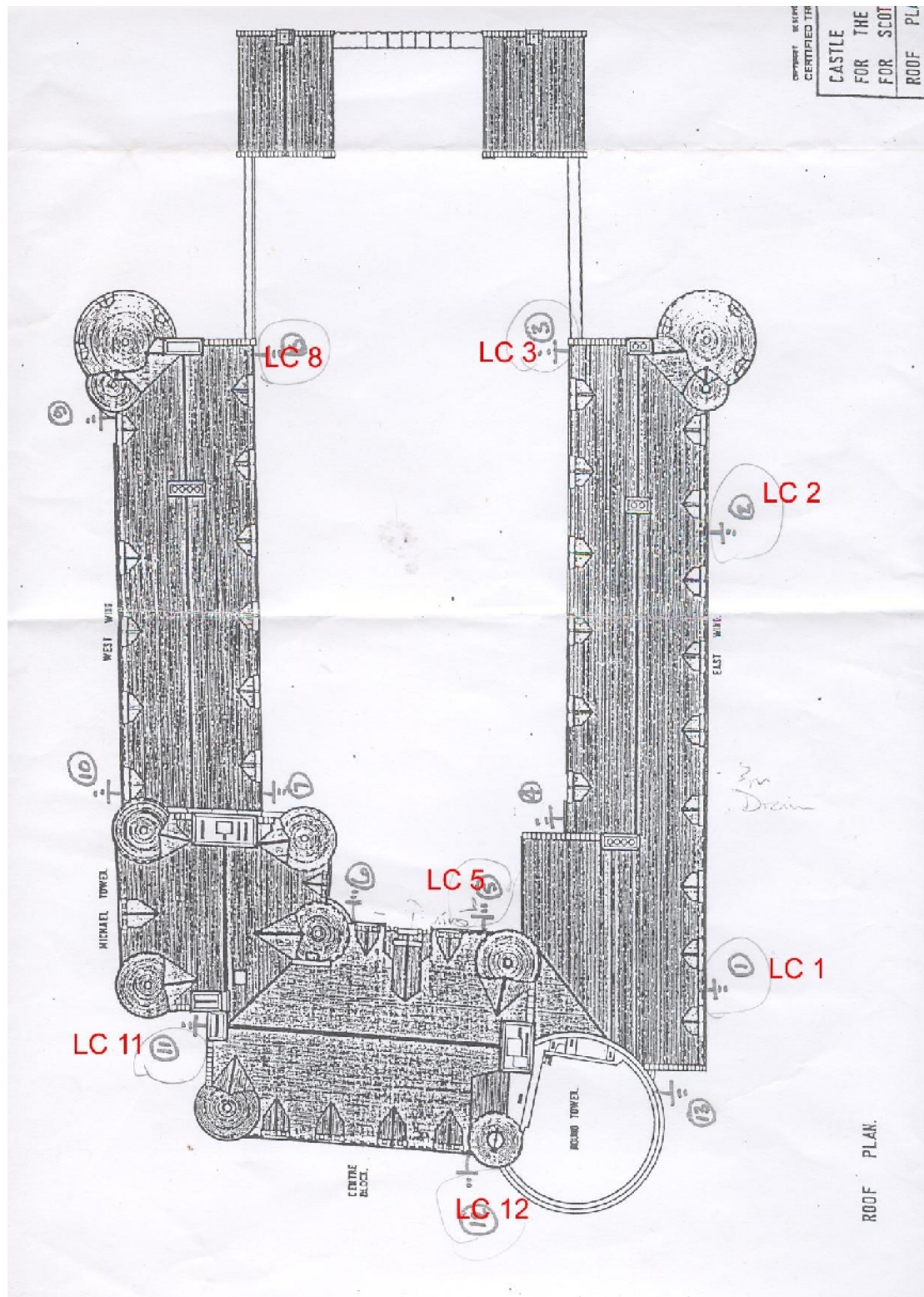
58	Position LC 8
59-64	Gen views LC 1 and 2
65-72	Details LC 11
73-75	Position LC 11
76-78	Details LC 11

### References

Murray H K 2010 *Castle Fraser Courtyard Aberdeenshire. Drain unblocking.* MAS 2010-24. Report for National Trust for Scotland

Murray H K and Murray J C 2010 *Castle Environs Project 2010: Castle Fraser Aberdeenshire.* MAS 2010-18 Report for National Trust for Scotland.

Murray H K and Murray J C 2011 *Courtyard Repaving Project 2011: Castle Fraser Aberdeenshire.* MAS 2011-3 Report for National Trust for Scotland.



Illus 18 Surveyor's plan of lightning conductors positions. Those marked in red were replaced in 2011 after archaeological observation





