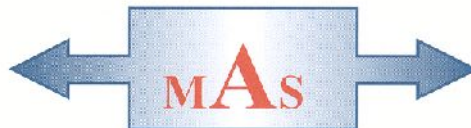


BARRA CASTLE OLDMELDRUM ABERDEENSHIRE



- Archaeological Watching Brief -
Carried out 19th September 2012
by
Murray Archaeological Services Ltd



Report No: MAS 2012-27
by
H K Murray & 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

BARRA CASTLE OLDMELDRUM ABERDEENSHIRE

-Archaeological Watching Brief-

H K Murray & J C Murray

1. Background

- 1.1 A Planning Application before Aberdeenshire Council (APP/2011/2240) for various works within Barra Castle and the laying of new flagstones in the courtyard was granted permission subject to certain conditions. Condition 3 required that an archaeological watching brief be carried out during the work in the courtyard. The condition was applied in the context of PAN (Planning Advice Note) 2/2011, SPP and SHEP.
- 1.2 Murray Archaeological Services Ltd was commissioned by Mr David Stephen to undertake the work; the field element of which was carried out on 19th September 2012.

2. The Site

- 2.1 Barra Castle is located c.2km SW of Oldmeldrum on the W side of the B9170 road to Inverurie [NJ 79223 25756; NMRS No: NJ72NE 7; Parish: Bourtie]
- 2.2 Barra Castle, as it currently stands, is comprised of an arrangement of buildings around three sides of a cobbled courtyard, with its fourth side being enclosed by a wall with a centrally placed entrance [Illus 3]. Described as an excellent example of a fortified laird's house, the architecture places it in the first half of the 17th Century, although the vaulted kitchen and adjacent hall on the ground floor of the W range and the chamber above, may date to the 15th

century. It is possible that the castle replaces an earlier building of the King family who lived here from the 13th century.

It is essentially an L-plan building, with the main building lying N-S and a wing projecting E from the S end with a circular stair tower in the E re-entrant. An 18th century addition extends from E from the N end of the main building, thus forming the third side of the square courtyard.



Illus 1. Courtyard before removal of cobbles.

3 Methodology

3.1 A mini-digger was used to remove the cobbles and the underlying soil under archaeological supervision.

3.2 Following this, where necessary, areas were cleaned by hand, photographed and recorded.

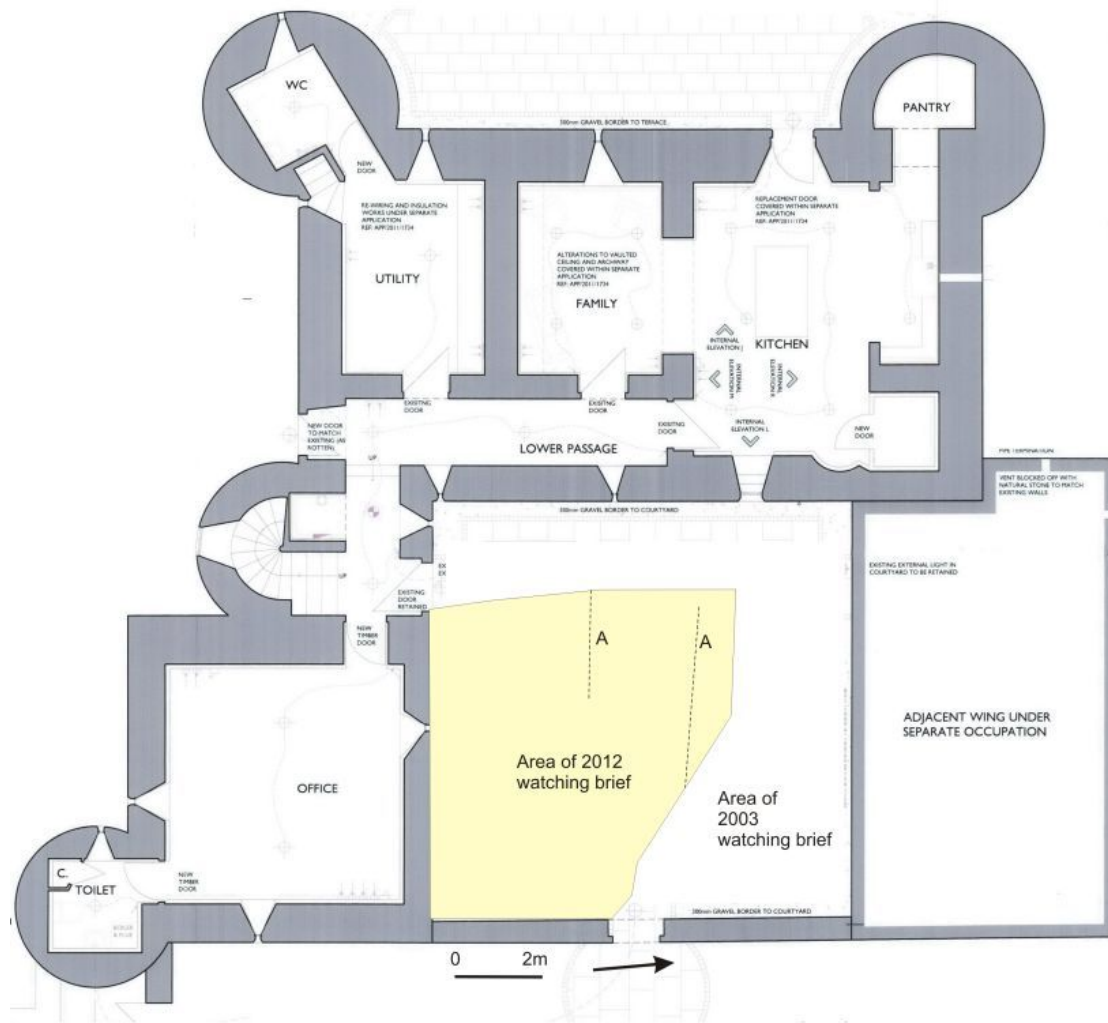
4. The Work

- 4.1 In 2003, work to remove the cobbles and flags along the W and N sides of the courtyard prior to resurfacing was subject to an archaeological watching brief. A very small area, 800mm x 400mm, of earlier cobbling close to the doorway in the W end of the S range was recorded. A portion of stone drain, 5.6m long and 300mm across, running E-W parallel to, and c.5m S of the S wall of the N range was also recorded. The E end of the drain ran below the enclosing wall of the courtyard.¹ It was not possible to date either feature.
- 4.2 In 2012, the remaining S area of the cobbles were removed. Prior to their removal it was noted that in the remaining cobbles in the central area there were two lines of slightly larger stones that framed a path towards the gate (Illus 2 , 3: A,A).



Illus 2 Courtyard looking E towards gate. Ranging rods indicate lines of larger cobbles leading to gate.

¹ J C Murray, 2003, Barra Castle, Oldmeldrum, Aberdeenshire: Archaeological Watching Brief, Carried out 28th January 2003. Unpublished Report.



Illus 3 Plan of the castle and courtyard annotated to show area of watching brief. A,A = lines of larger stones in cobbles.

5 Results

5.1 The cobbles had been set in a mixture of topsoil and redeposited natural clay. In the central area this lay to a depth of up to 500mm below the upper surface of the cobbles and extended directly onto an irregular surface of natural rock outcrop. At the S side of the courtyard there was only c. 180-200mm of topsoil and disturbed cobbles above the rock. The natural boulder clay which would normally be over and around the rock appeared to have been removed when the topsoil mix had been used to level the cobbles at the time they were set in the courtyard. The E wall of the courtyard was built on the natural rock with some boulder clay surviving over the rock beside the wall.



Illus 4 Section in central area showing topsoil/clay mix over natural rock below cobbles.



Illus 5 Detail of S end of inner side of E courtyard wall showing boulder clay surviving on natural rock beside wall.

- 5.2 With the exception of two small undiagnostic pieces of clay tobacco pipe stem, there were no artefacts in the soil below the cobbles.
- 5.3 There was no evidence of earlier surviving features below the topsoil mix under the cobbles.



Illus 6 Courtyard from SW corner showing natural rock below the cobbles and leveling topsoil/clay mix.

Appendices

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

Photographic catalogue – Barra Castle, Oldmeldrum	
Digital frame no	Content
1-3	Courtyard prior to removal of cobbles, looking NW
4	As above, looking NE
5-8	SE corner of courtyard after removal of cobbles, looking E
9-10	Detail of clay below cobbles, looking E
11-14	General views of Castle, looking W
15-16	View of central cobbles flanked by lines of larger cobbles on N and S sides, looking E towards courtyard entrance
17-20	View showing depth of soil below the S line of cobbles, looking N
21-22	View of depth of soil below cobbles in centre of courtyard, looking NE
23-26	General views of courtyard after removal of cobbles, looking E and NE