

DUNNOTAR CASTLE STONEHAVEN ABERDEENSHIRE

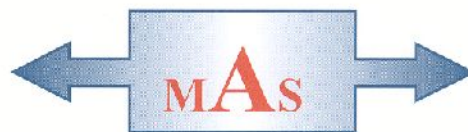


- Archaeological Watching Brief -

Carried out 18th & 19th May 2015

by

Murray Archaeological Services Ltd



Report No: MAS 2015-15

by

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1. Background

- 1.1 An application to conduct small remedial works at Dunnottar Castle required Scheduled Monument Consent from Historic Scotland (Index No. M986; Case ID 201406501). The Consent was granted subject to certain conditions. Condition no.2 stipulates that no work shall take place until the applicant has secured the initiation of a programme of archaeological work in accordance with a written scheme of investigation approved by Historic Scotland.
- 1.2 Murray Archaeological Services Ltd was commissioned by Dunecht Estates to provide a Written Scheme of Investigation and to undertake the work which was carried out 18th – 19th May 2015.

2. The Site

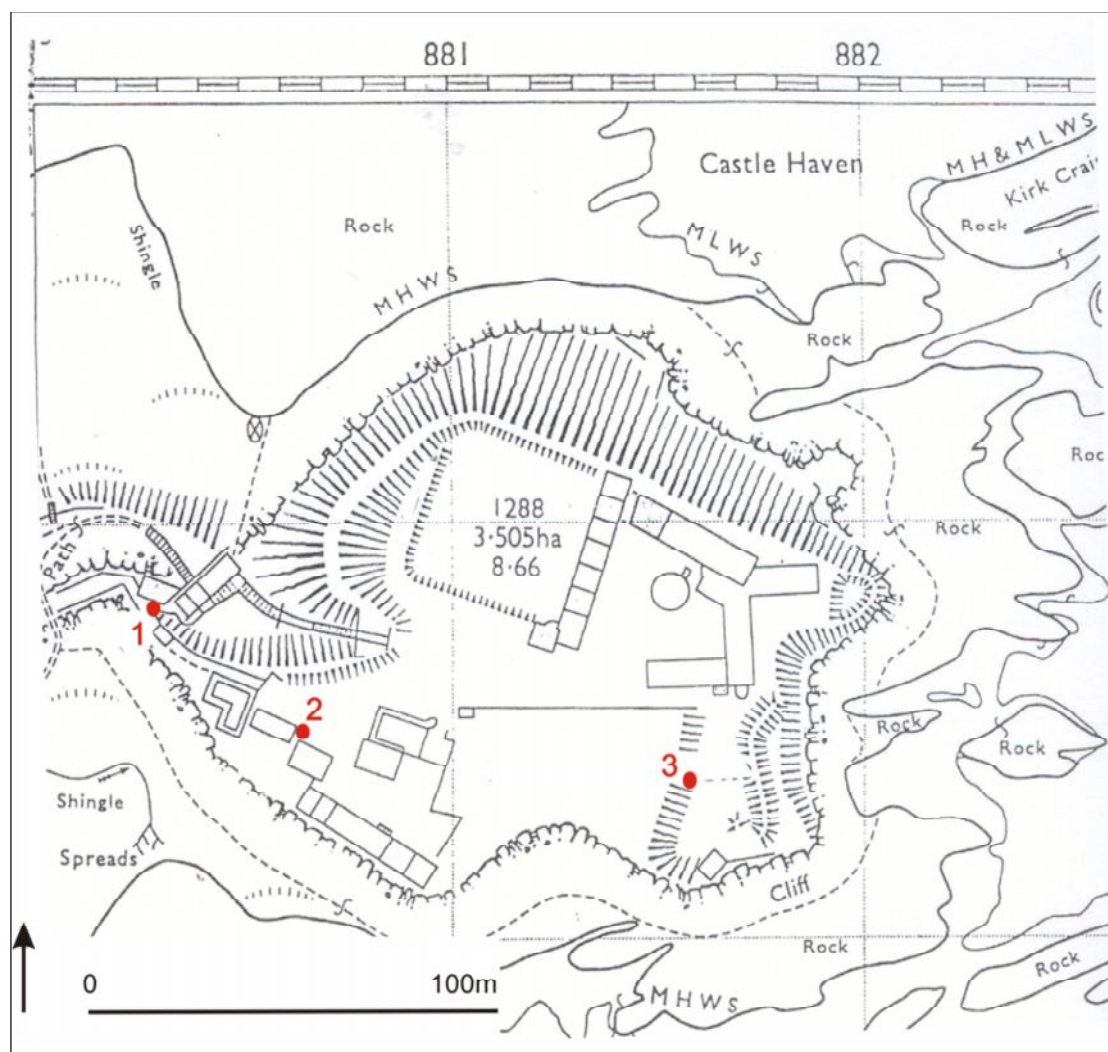
- 2.1 Dunnottar Castle occupies a coastal promontory c.3km S of Stonehaven, protected on all sides by steep cliffs [NGR: NO88128 83842; NMRS No: NO88SE 11; Parish: Dunnottar]. Although the castle probably occupies the site of a prehistoric fort, in its present form the remains date to various periods from the 14th to the 17th centuries.
- 2.2 Remedial works were carried out at three separate sites within the Castle area:
SITE 1
Site 1 is located to the S of Benholm's Lodging and W of Wallace's Postern, the tunnel leading to the Keep. The work required the erection of a safety rail on the E side of steps ascending to the tunnel.

SITE 2

Site 2 is located between the NW corner of the Smithy and the NE corner of the Store and involved the removal of soil and rubble to enable the construction of a small retaining wall.

SITE 3

Site 3 is located at steps leading from the SE side of the graveyard down to the Guardhouse and which also required the erection of a safety rail on the W side of the steps.



Illus 1: Castle Plan showing site locations

3. Methodology

- 3.1 The excavation of all the post-holes for the fences at Sites 1 and 3, and the removal of soil and rubble at Site 2, was done by hand under archaeological supervision.

4. The Work

4.1 SITE 1 (Illus.1)

Three post-holes were excavated on the E side of the steps and the pathway over a distance of 4.5m. They were excavated into the side of a steep bank which is retained at the NW end by a low wall and further up to the SE by wire mesh.

Hole 1: was at the bottom of the four steps and measured 500mm x 400mm and was 600mm deep. The fill consisted of brown soil mixed with small stone and some animal bone and one piece of clay tobacco pipe stem.

Hole 2: was located 1.9m SE of Hole 1 with the same dimensions and fill.

Hole 3: was located 2m SE of Hole 2. It was 400mm x 400mm and was only 500mm deep as the revetting at this point consisted of vegetation, stone and some earth.

No archaeological features or finds were evident at Site 1.



Illus 2: Steps at Site 1, looking SE.



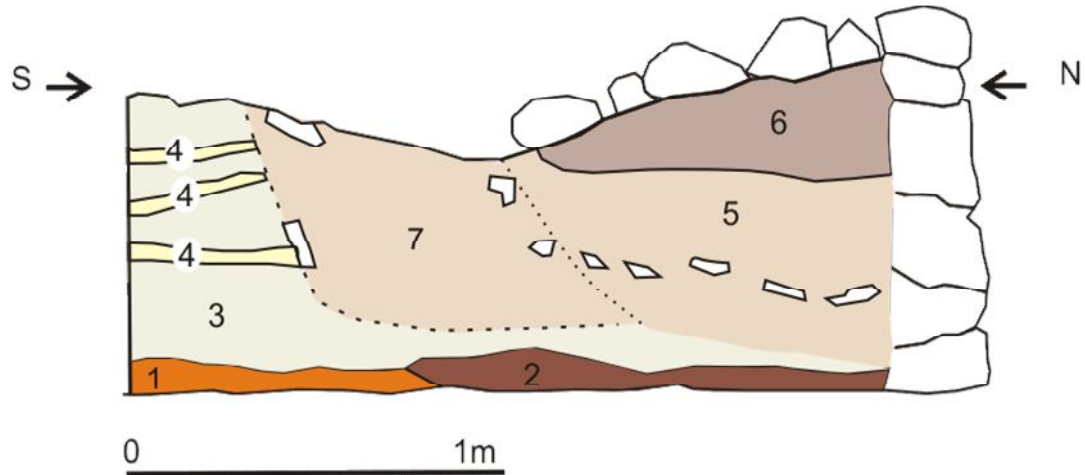
Illus 3: Hole 3 at Site 1, showing the stoney nature of the bank, looking NE.

4.2 SITE 2 (Illus.1, 4-6)

Between the NW corner of the Smithy and the NE corner of the Store, a slope had built up between the two buildings. In order to deter visitors from accessing the slope, the soil and rubble bank was cut back just enough to enable the construction of a small retaining wall. The slope was cut back c.600mm over a distance of 1.9m, with a foundation trench 300mm deep. The face of the cut was c.800mm high at its N and S ends dipping to c.600mm in the centre.

At the base of the cut, a 200mm layer of red slightly silty burnt material (1) may represent red ash from the smithy fires deposited in the corner between the two buildings (Illus.4). It merged with (2), a layer of red ash mixed with charcoal and soil. These base layers contained much animal bone and a single body sherd of late medieval/early post medieval pottery possibly 16th century in date. The red ash (1 and 2), on the S side of the cut, was overlain by a 700mm deep deposit of brown soil and charcoal with three distinct layers of mortar (3 and 4). These layers also contained animal bone, clay tobacco pipe stems and a portion of a pipe bowl of possible 17th - century date.

Layers (7) and (5) cut the mortar levels and consisted of brown soil mixed through with much small stone. Above (5), a 300mm layer of cleaner brown soil (6) and stone may represent gradual collapse of material from the wall abutting the NE corner of the Store building.



Illus 4: Section through the soil and rubble at Site 2.



Illus 5: Location of Site 2, looking SW.



Illus 6: Detail of section, Site 2.

4.3 SITE 3 (Illus.1, 7-8)

On the SE side of the graveyard a series of nine steps, measuring 7.8m from top to bottom, lead down to the Guardhouse.



Illus 7: Site 3 steps, looking NW.

Although it was initially intended to install five posts to hold the safety rail, only three were deemed necessary, at steps two, six and nine.

Hole 1: measured 400mm x 400mm x 250mm deep. The hole was cut partly into a grass covered bank on the S side of the steps and the fill consisted of dark soil with some small stone and small amounts of animal bone.

Hole 2: was 3.1m NW of Hole 1 and measured 500mm x 400mm x 200mm deep. At the rear of the post it cut into the bank to a depth of 750mm. The fill was the same as Hole 1.



Illus 8: Site 3, Hole 2, looking SW.

Hole 3: was c.2.5m from Hole 2 and measured 450mm x 400mm x 300mm deep. Again, the fill was brown soil with some animal bone.

It is possible that the bank into which the post-holes were excavated was a spread of soil and midden material over this area of the castle interior.

No archaeological features or finds were evident in this area

5. Results

- 5.1 The excavations for the rail posts at Sites 1 and 3 yielded no features or material other than some animal bone.

- 5.2 At Site 2, the cut back of the soil, rubble and possible midden material yielded a single sherd of internally green glazed pottery of probable 16th - century date, and pieces of clay tobacco pipe of probable 17th - and 18th/19th - century date.

Catalogue of Digital Photographs (Supplied to Archive)

1	Site 1, at Benholm's Lodging, looking N
2	Site 1, looking SE from base of steps
3-4	Site 1, Hole 1
5-6	Site 1, Hole 2
7-10	Site 1, Hole 3
11	Site 3 steps, looking E
12-13	Site 3 steps, looking W
14-15	Site 3, Hole 1
16-18	Site 3, Hole 2, looking W
19-20	Site 3, Hole 3, looking SW
21-23	Site 2, general views, looking W
24-33	Site 2, views of section, looking W
33-35	General views of Smithy and corner of Store building, looking NW