

SCARBOROUGH ARCHAEOLOGICAL
AND
HISTORICAL SOCIETY



ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS AT
AYTON CASTLE, WEST AYTON,
NORTH YORKSHIRE
MARCH 2013

CHRISTOPHER HALL



Ayton Castle in 1965. From an original pen and ink drawing by George Pye held in the SAHS archives

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 During the period 28 March 4 April, The Scarborough Archaeological and Historical Society (SAHS) carried out archaeological investigations in association with phase 2 of the restoration of Ayton Castle. This work was carried out in compliance with a requirement of English Heritage grant aid that a trial archaeological excavation be done in the vaulted chambers to determine the original floor level.
- 1.2 The aim of the archaeological investigation was to establish the nature, extent and state of preservation of any previous floor levels within the vaulted chambers. It was intended that the results of this work would provide greater understanding of the development of this part of the building and hence inform any future work which may be carried out here.

2.0 Historical and Archaeological Background

- 2.1 The site has already been the focus of extensive study. Excavations were carried out by Scarborough & District Archaeological Society (as SAHS was then called) between 1958 and 1961. Although the Society cleared out the vaulted chamber it is thought that they did not excavate into the archaeology. Archaeological and architectural surveys were carried out by BHWB in 1996, by Ed Denison Associates in 2008 and a Conservation Management Plan prepared by Purcell, Miller, Tritton in 2008. It is therefore not proposed to rehearse the history and development of the site here. However all these studies helped to inform the archaeological investigations.



Figure: 1. Photograph dated 1958 from the SAHS archives where it is captioned 'cleaning out tons of cow dung from cellar or buttery'

3.0 Objectives of the investigation

- 3.1 The objectives of the archaeological investigation were to determine by means of trenching the nature, depth, extent and state of preservation of archaeological

deposits within the vaulted chambers; in particular, but not exclusively, earlier floor levels. To this end two main trenches were excavated along with a subsidiary trench.

- 3.2 In addition to the trenching referred to above, the former staircase to the upper floor level located within the thickness of the north-west wall was archaeologically cleared of debris and rubble. This gave the opportunity to examine whether any evidence of the remained

4 The Excavation

- 4.1 All loose stones were cleared from the relevant floor areas under archaeological supervision. It had been intended that any worked stone would be carefully set aside for possible re-use in the restoration of the building. In the event no such stone was found.
- 4.2 Three trenches were excavated and their locations are shown on Figure 2 below. All deposits were fully recorded on standard context sheets, photographs and conventionally-scaled plans. Annex 1 is a list of Contexts and Annex 2 a list if finds.

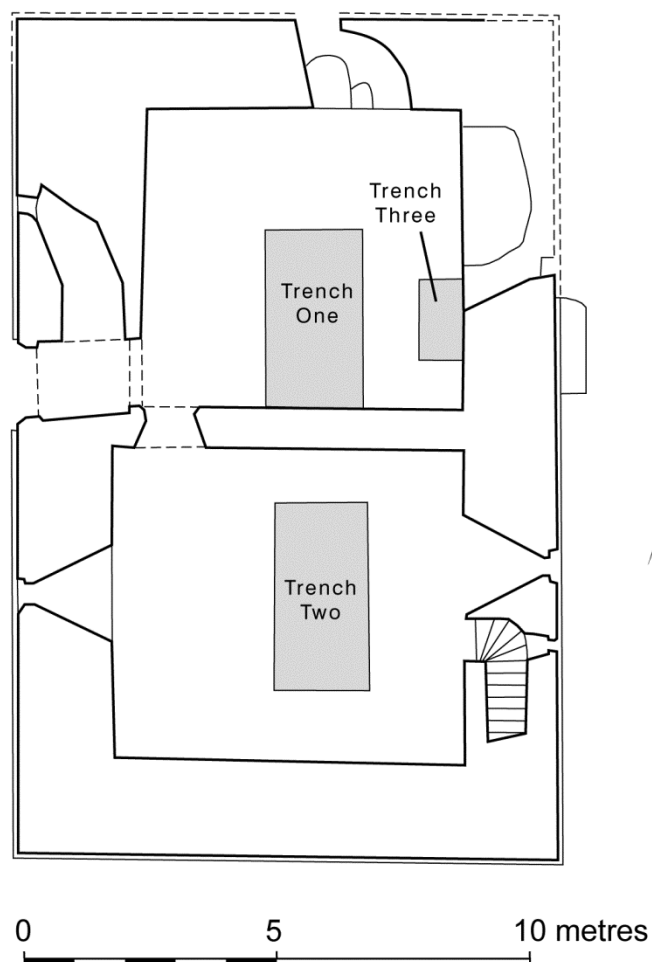


Figure 2: Location of the trenches

Trench 1

- 4.3 Trench 1 (see figure 3) measured 4.0 metres by 2.0 metres and was excavated in the northern chamber of the basement with one edge against the cross wall. The present floor surface next to the cross wall was at 46.80m AOD rising to 46.98m AOD towards the north-east. Natural clay was encountered 46.64m AOD.

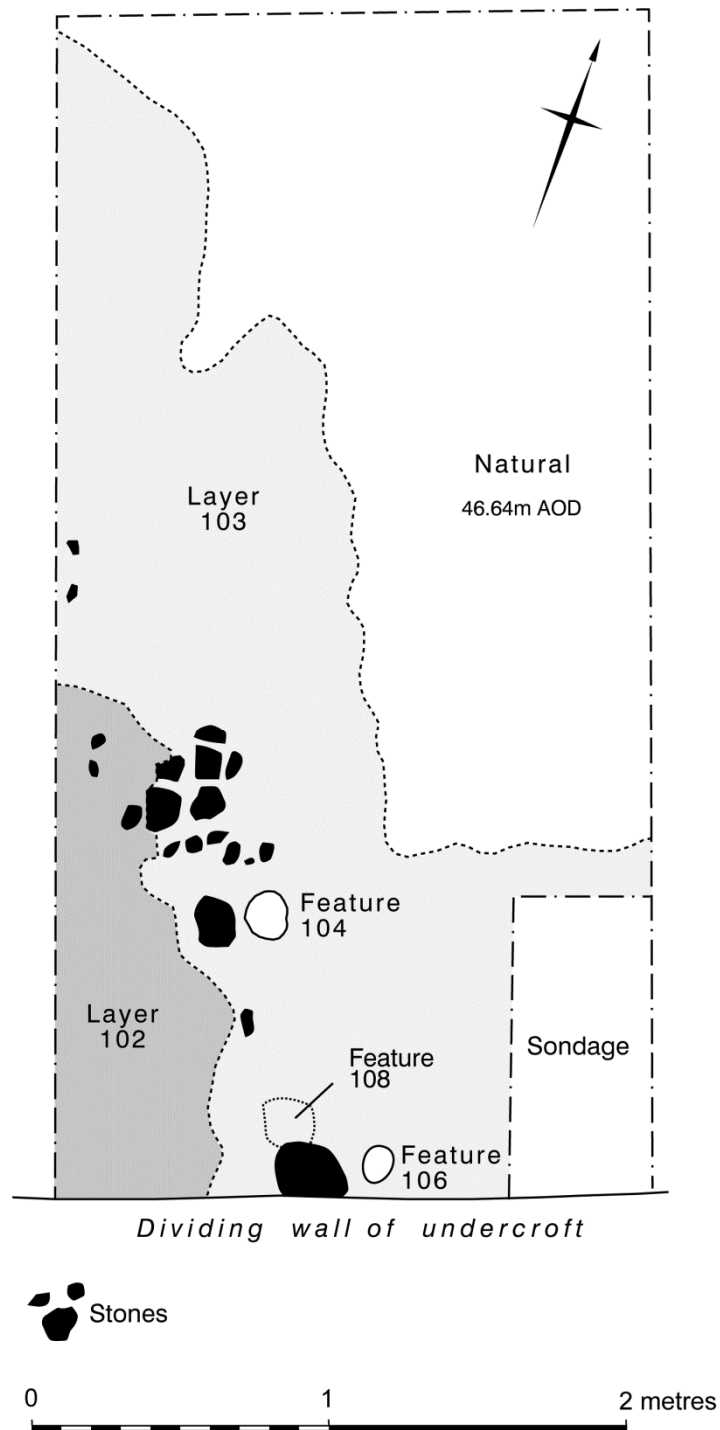


Figure 3: Plan of Trench 1

- 4.4 Natural consisted of a stiff orange brown boulder clay. Over about half the trench it was overlain by an hard surface (context 103) consisting of small stones set into the



Figure 4: General view of Trench 1 from the entrance to the chamber

natural clay. In the south- west corner of the trench the surface (given context number 102) consisted of larger broken stones also set into clay (Figure 5). It was not clear whether 102 and 103 were the same floor made of slightly varying stones or whether 103 formed the substrate for 102. It is likely that 102/103 had extended over the whole area of the chamber and had been robbed out. No direct dating evidence attributable to the construction of this surface was found.

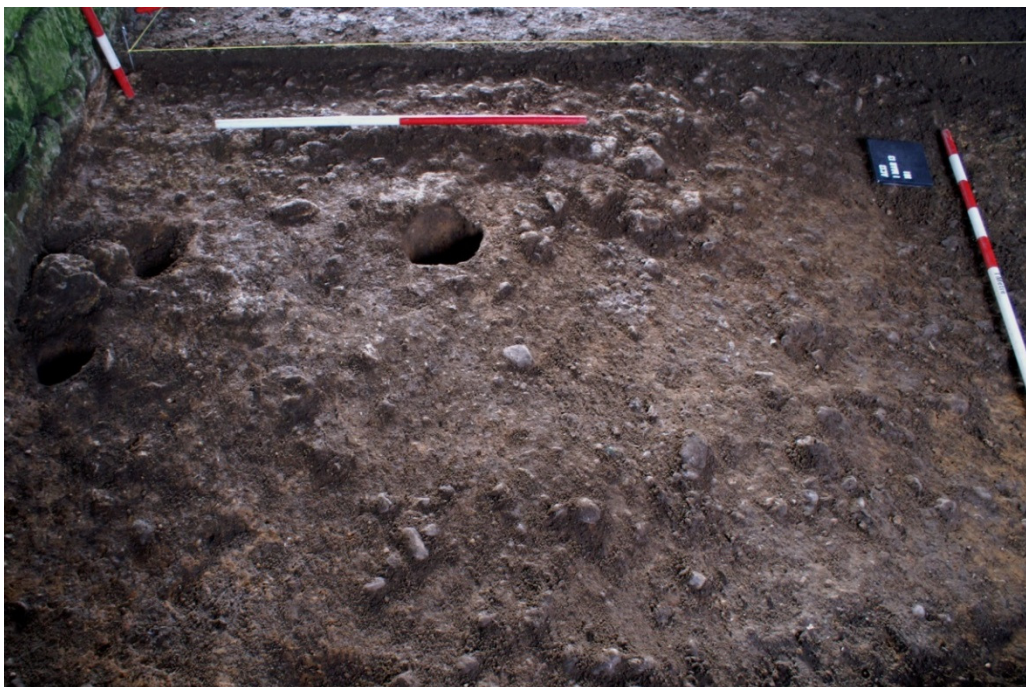


Figure 5: Detail of contexts 103 (foreground), 102 and the post holes F104, F106 and F108

- 4.5 Surface 103 was pierced by three post holes F104, F106 and F108 (Figure 5) . No artefacts were found in the fill of these post holes (contexts 105, 107 and 109 respectively) however the dark loamy fill was similar to context 100 (see below) and these post holes (which penetrated the floor surface) were interpreted as modern features associated with animals being kept in the chambers.
- 4.6 The clay and surfaces 102 and 103 were overlain by two layers containing modern artefacts. Layer 101 was a clayey layer with stone and mortar inclusions and fragments of modern brick and quarry tile. Five sherds of pottery were all of 19th or 20th century. Overlying 101, 100 was a dark loamy layer again with some mortar flecks, brick fragments and modern pottery.
- 4.7 It was noticed that the cross wall appeared to have been built directly off either the natural material or surface 103. In order to test this a small sondage was excavated in the south-east corner of the trench. The wall was confirmed to have been built directly off clay which was at this point much more stony than usual (Figure 7). The suggestion is put forward that surface 103 predates the building of the tower and that the tower was built directly off both the natural and this pre-existing surface resulting in the weight of the wall pushing the stones of the surface into the clay. This was possibly a yard associated with the earlier buildings.



Figure 6:Trench 1 looking towards the cross wall. Natural in the foreground



Figure 7
The material under the cross wall

Trench 2

- 4.8 Trench 2 (see figure 8) measured 4.0 metres by 2.0 metres and was excavated in the southern chamber. In this case the trench was kept clear of the cross wall due to the possible presence of bats in the wall. At the northerly end the present surface is at 46.84m AOD rising to 46.90m AODm at the south. Natural was encountered at 46.78m AOD (average). The natural clay here was much less even than in Trench 1 due to later disturbance (Figure 9)

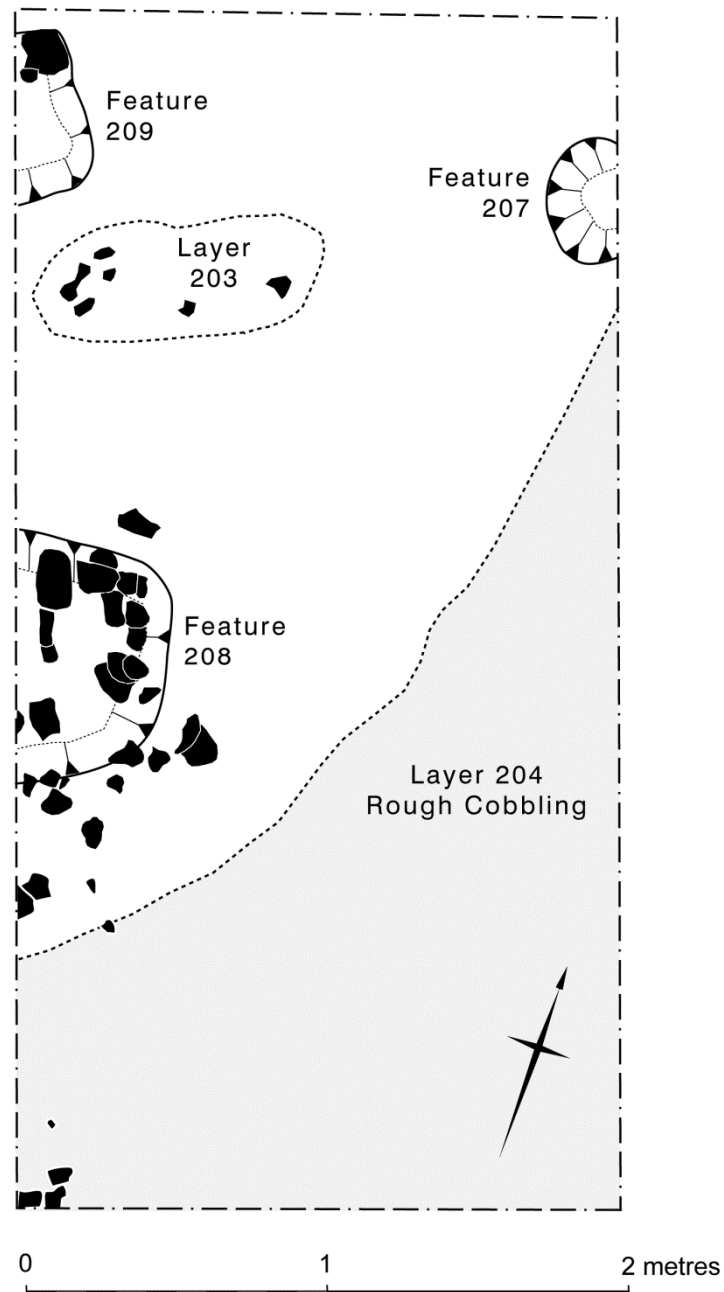


Figure 8: Plan of Trench 2

- 4.9 The natural was immediately overlain by an 'island' of small stone inclusions (203) and a more convincing surface also of small stone inclusions (204) set in a clay matrix and with an irregular edge. This surface was similar to the ones found in Trench 1 though there was no distinction between the types of stone. It also had the appearance of being robbed out with a small area retained at 203.



Figure 9: Detail of Trench 2 showing F208 cut into the natural

- 4.10 The natural clay was penetrated by three features. F207 was an oval cut 400mm long by 250mm wide and 300mm deep. Its dark loamy fill (202) contained two sherds of post 19th century pottery and the bones of a small animal – it may have been dug for the burial of these bones.
- 4.11 F208 was larger bowl shaped feature 800mm by 400mm by 320mm deep. It was flanked by a series of stones set vertically. Its fill, 205 was a dark ashy material which contained 2 sherds of modern bottle glass and 1 sherd of post 19th century pottery.



Figure 10: Trench 2 showing F208 in the background

- 4.12 F209 was another oval shaped cut 360mm by 300mm and 300mm deep. Again its fill 206 contained modern bottle glass and, more tellingly, a plastic pepper pot lid.
- 4.13 As with the post holes in Trench one, the features F207, F208 and F209 were interpreted as being relatively modern ephemeral uses of the chamber.

4.14 Both the natural and the floor surfaces 203/204 were topped by a dark loamy material with stone inclusions, modern detritus including post 19th century glass and pottery. This layer was taken off in two spits and numbered 200 and 201, though only 201 contained artefacts: 19th century glass and possible roof tile fragments.

Trench 3

4.15 This small trench measuring 1.5 metres by 1.0 metre and was designed to test the foundations of the main wall and in particular whether there was a foundation cut, or whether, like the cross wall it was built directly off the natural clay. It was therefore excavated alongside the north-east wall of the chamber.

4.16 It was confirmed that as with the cross wall, there was no foundation cut and that the main outer wall was also built directly off the natural clay (Figure 11)



Figure 11: Trench 3 looking toward the cross wall

5.0 The Staircase

5.1 The staircase was cleared archaeologically of all debris and loose rubble. Annex 3 is a series of photographs showing the cleared staircase, the bottom step and the passage of the main entrance which was also cleared. No residual steps were found under the debris although the packing underneath the possible step positions was seen.

6.0 Conclusions

- No evidence was found for a series of floor levels built up over the years.

- No evidence was found for a floor consisting of either glazed clay tiles or stone flags.
- The suggestion is put forward that the tower was built over a pre-existing surface which may or may not have been partially robbed out by the time the tower was built
- This surface may have been the 'wearing' course for the chamber wall or it may have been reinforced by surface 102
- Later activity probably due to the use of the chamber for agricultural purposes has resulted in surfaces and natural clay being disturbed by pits and post holes which are no earlier than the 19th century

7.0 Acknowledgements

This archaeological investigation was commissioned by Scarborough Borough Council and the assistance of SBC staff Alan Dargue, Asset Management Officer is acknowledged.

The excavation was directed by the author and carried out by SAHS members Pete Beecroft, Steve Bence, Martin Bland, Chris Evans, John Hinchliffe, Siriol Hinchliffe, Linda Kemp, Vanessa Milner, Mick Panton, Trevor Pearson, Jane Peutrell, Dr Brian Rahn, Emma Temlett, Simon Temlett and also Ken Oakden of the Friends of Ayton Castle. Ken Oakden also assisted with the Risk Assessment.

The drawings were prepared for publication by Trevor Pearson.

8.0 Documentary references

AUTHOR	DATE	TITLE
BHWB 1996	1996	Ayton Castle West Ayton North Yorkshire: An archaeological and architectural survey Report 1685/
Ed Denison Associates	2008	Ayton Castle West Ayton North Yorkshire Phase 1 Repairs. Architectural and archaeological recording Report 2005/263.RO1
Purcell Miller Tritton	2008	Ayton Castle Conservation Management Plan March 2008
Rimington, F C & Rutter, J G	1967	Ayton Castle: its history and excavation. SDAS Research Report 5.

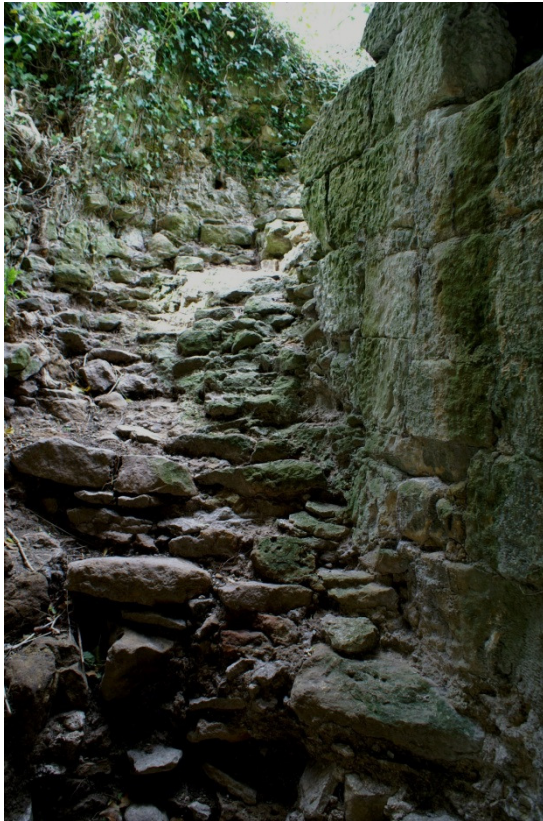
Annex 1 List of contexts

Context number	Description
TRENCH 1	
100	Dark Loam with rubble and modern pottery
101	Compacted clay with modern pottery
102	Small broken stones set into clay – cobble surface
103	Stony surface set into clay
F104	Post hole
105	Dark loamy fill of post hole F104 similar to 101
F106	Post hole
107	Dark loamy fill of post hole F106 similar to 101
F108	Post hole
109	Stone and loam packing to post hole
TRENCH 2	
200	Dark Loam with rubble and modern pottery
201	Dark Loam with rubble and modern pottery
202	Fill of F207 dark loam
203	Small broken stones set into clay
204	Stony surface set into clay
205	Dark ashy fill of F208
206	Dark loamy fill of F209
F207	Circular cut into natural
F208	Circular cut into natural with series of vertical stones
F209	Circular cut into natural

Annex 2 List of finds

Context	Description	Number
100	Modern glass (19 th >) – sherds	25
	Modern pottery (19 th >) – sherds	2
	Modern quarry tile (19 th >) – sherd	1
	Modern floor tile (19 th >) – sherd	1
	Limestone roof tile with peg hole	1
	Iron window catch 19 th .	1
	Iron nails	3
	Aluminium ring pull	1
	Metal bottle top	
	End of bungee	1
101	Modern quarry tile (19 th >) – sherd	13
	Modern pottery (19 th >) – sherds	5
	Modern brick fragment	1
	Animal bone fragments – butchered	3
	Animal bone fragment	1
	Roof tile post 18 th	1
201	Modern glass (19 th >) – sherds	5
	Clay ?roof tile fragments	2
202	Modern pottery (19 th >) – sherds	2
	Bones of small animal	
205	Modern glass (19 th >) – sherds	2
	Modern pottery (19 th >) – sherds	1
	Flint	1
	Bone fragment	1
206	Modern glass (19 th >) – sherds	2
	Animal bone fragments – butchered	2
	Animal bone fragment	1
	Animal tooth	1
	Plastic pepper pot lid	1

Annex 3 Photographs of the staircase



SAHS RECENT FIELD WORK REPORTS

Interim 32	An archaeological excavation at the Newcastle Packet, Sandside	2000
Interim 33	A watching brief at the former convent school, Queen Street	2000
Interim 34	An earthwork survey of Seamer Manor House	2002
Interim 35	An archaeological excavation and watching brief at 58 Quay Street	2003
Interim36	An archaeological excavation at the former Pentecostal Church	Forthcoming
Interim 37	An archaeological evaluation at the lounge site, Harcourt Place	2004
Interim 38	An archaeological evaluation excavation at the site of the former 23 Quay Street, Scarborough	2006
Interim 39	An archaeological excavation at Auborough Street, Scarborough	2010
Report 40	Investigation of a pre-historic square enclosure at Racecourse Road, Seamer Moor	January 2013
Report 41	An archaeological excavation at 34 Queen St, Scarborough	January 2013
Report 42	Archaeological Investigation into a Linear Earthwork at Seamer Moor, Scarborough	January 2013
Report 43	Archaeological excavations at 60-62 Quay St, Scarborough	Forthcoming
Report 44	Archaeological investigations on land at Raven Hall Rd, Ravenscar, North Yorkshire	Forthcoming
Report 45	Archaeological investigations at Ayton Castle, West Ayton, North Yorkshire	September 2013