

HISTORIC SCOTLAND PROPERTIES IN CARE
MINOR ARCHAEOLOGICAL WORKS 2011

Tolquhon Castle: Drainage Trench, Watching Brief, February 2011

HS PIC Index Number: 90302

Site: Tolquhon Castle (near Tarves), Aberdeenshire.

NGR: NJ 872 286

Project Description: Watching Brief during the excavation of a drainage trench to prevent flooding of the drain W of the Ticket Office.

Project Code: HSCO-90302-2011-01

Contents:	Introduction	1
	Description	2
	Conclusions	4
	List of Contexts	6
	List of Digital Photographs	6
	List of Drawings	7
	List of Small Finds	7

Short Archaeological Report

**19th March 2011
Kirkdale Archaeology**

INTRODUCTION

Under the terms of its PIC call-off contract with Historic Scotland, Kirkdale Archaeology was asked to undertake an archaeological watching brief during the excavation of a drainage trench within the forecourt on the N side of Tolquhon Castle (Fig. 1). The existing drain, on the NW side of the Ticket Office, was prone to flooding during heavy rain, and the purpose of the new drainage channel was to divert water from the path to the ditch on the S side of the ticket office, thereby preventing the existing drain from flooding. The drain was originally planned to run the full length of the path running SSW/NNE through the forecourt, but was changed to a shorter track running W/E across the path and then SW/NE where it could drain into the ditch.

The walled forecourt has an irregular quadrangular shape with a stable block to the E, Castle to the SSE, Ticket Office to the N, Dovecot to the NE and arched main gate to the NNW. The forecourt was laid out in the 16th century as a formal garden with paths and parterres which lasted until the 18th century when the layout was de-formalised to a more naturalistic landscape of grass and trees. Previous excavations have shown that evidence of paths and garden beds survive below the current ground level. A 1930s plan of the castle shows the forecourt bisected by the NNW/SSE path with a further (now not visible) branch running ESE to the stable block (Fig. 4). The SW and NW forecourt walls are shown lined with trees, none of which are present today.

The work was carried out on the 28th February 2011.

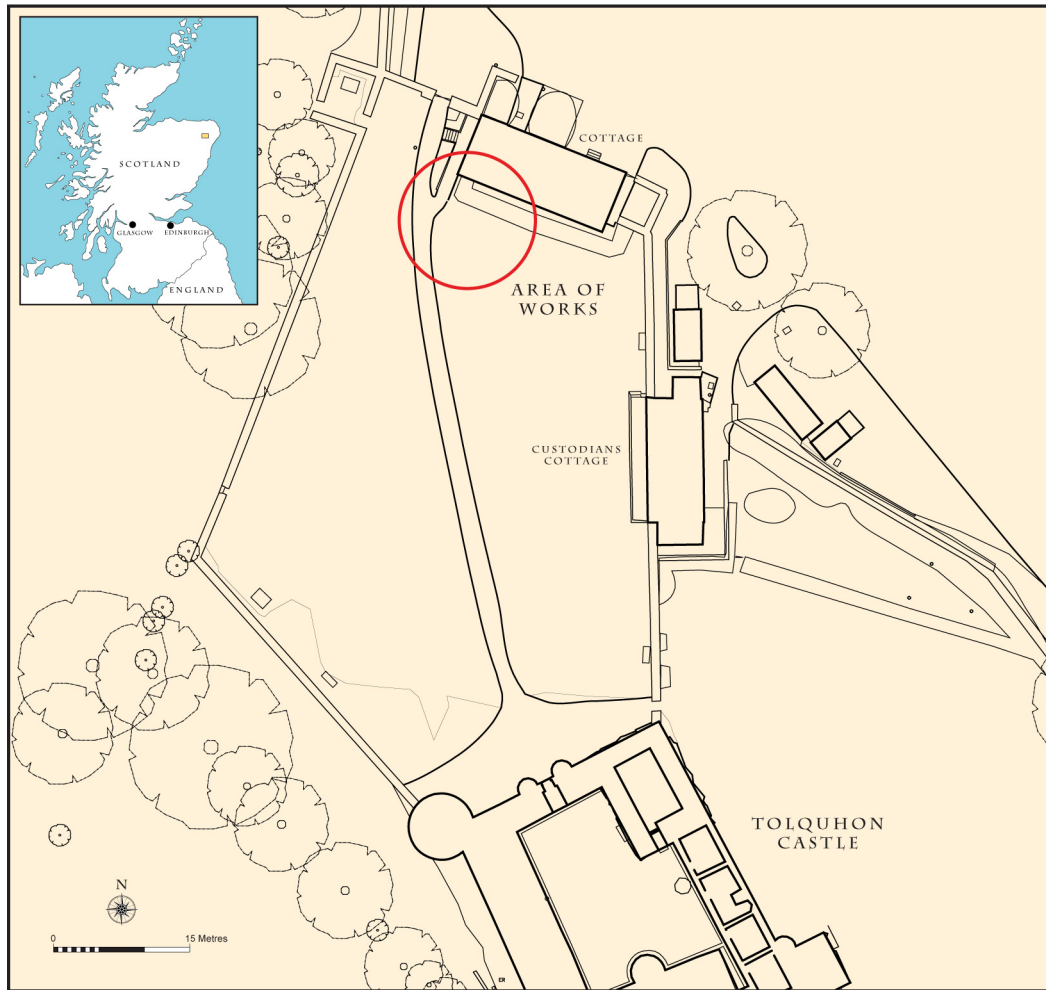


Figure 1: Location map of the works.

DESCRIPTION

The trench (see Fig. 2 and Fig. 3) measured 0.3m wide x 0.5m deep x 8.50m SW/NE. It was located on the grassed area to the E of the path and it terminated to the NE at the apex of the ditch on the S side of the ticket office. The trench was widened to create a sump in the path 0.8m NNE/SSW x 1.60m ESE/WNW x 0.08-0.15m deep. In the grassed area, the section consisted of turf and mid-brown topsoil (**101**), 200mm deep, overlying a laid bed of mid-brown silt and slate (**102**), 100mm thick. This cleared onto a compacted layer (**103**) of sub-angular stones (<200mm) in a matrix of mid-brown silt with clay clasts, which together with (**101**) and (**102**) appeared to be landscaping which post-dates the 1930's. This is assumed by the remains of a

possible path base (**105**), 750mm wide running WNW/ESE composed of small angular stones (<70mm) indicated on the 1930s plan mentioned in the introduction.

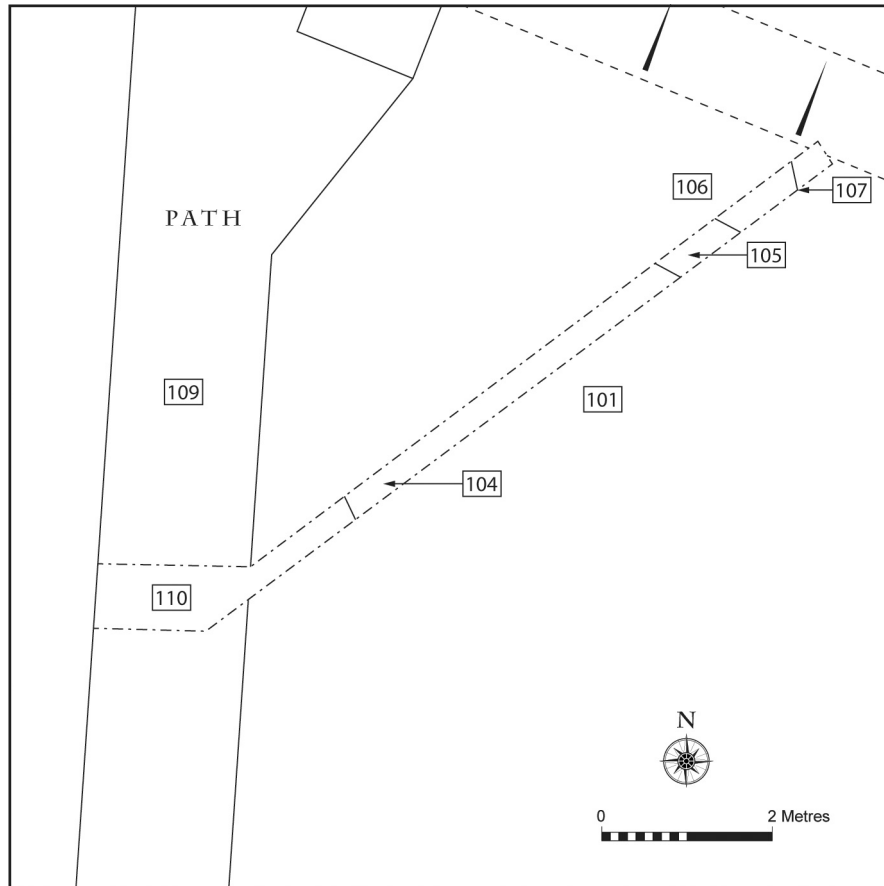


Figure 2: Plan of Trench 1.

This was located below layer (**103**), not cut through it, although it was cut into a surface of yellowish-brown compact clay (**104**). This would suggest that subsequent to the 1930s a large amount of landscaping has taken place. The surface (**104**) therefore represents a more historic horizon through which the modern features have been cut, and it yielded a single body sherd of eroded green-glaze pottery **SF001**. Context (**104**) was noticeably stonier to the SSW, which may indicate either the remains of a path to the castle or an associated garden feature. To the NE of context (**105**) was an area of disturbed black silt (**106**) containing lots of modern pottery, suggesting that there had been a later banking of material at the head of the ditch.

Within this layer was a shallow sloping cut (108) for a British Telecom cable (107). To the SW, where the trench crossed the path, the path make-up (109) was shown to be an undulating layer of sand and gravel 80-150mm deep over a layer of sub-angular stones (<100mm) and gravel (110). Although not fully revealed, these contexts may indicate an early garden feature or path at least 3.60m wide NE/SW. As contexts (104) and (110) were not disturbed by the works, they remained un-excavated and therefore preserved *in situ*.

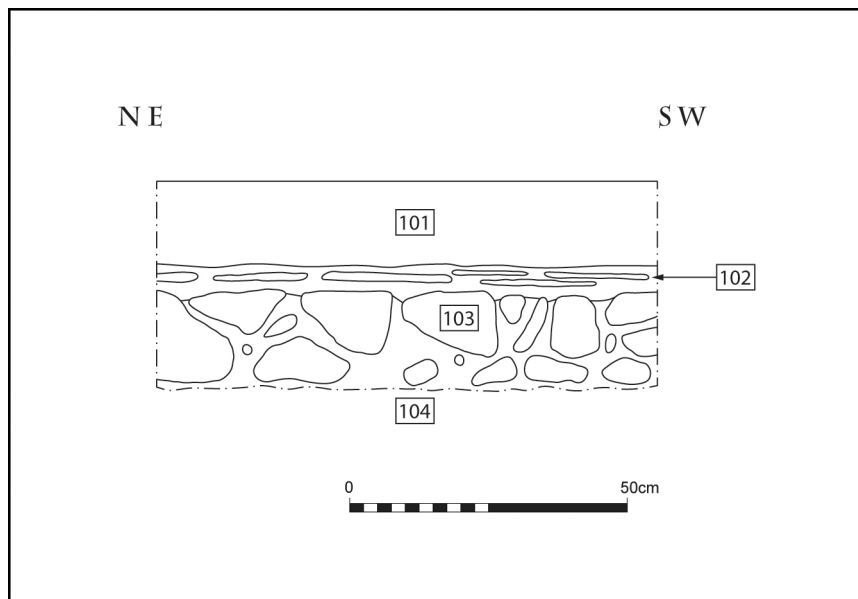


Figure 3: Representative NW-facing section in Trench 1.

CONCLUSIONS

While layer (101) – (103) and (106) – (109) can be shown to be of a late date, the only question mark is over whether context (105) represents the path illustrated on the 1930s plan, or an earlier path on the same alignment - the later path having been removed by post-1930s landscaping.

This watching brief illustrated the high potential for features in the area, while previous excavations have revealed much of the original and intervening landscapes

forming the approach to the castle. Any future ground-breaking works should therefore be similarly monitored.

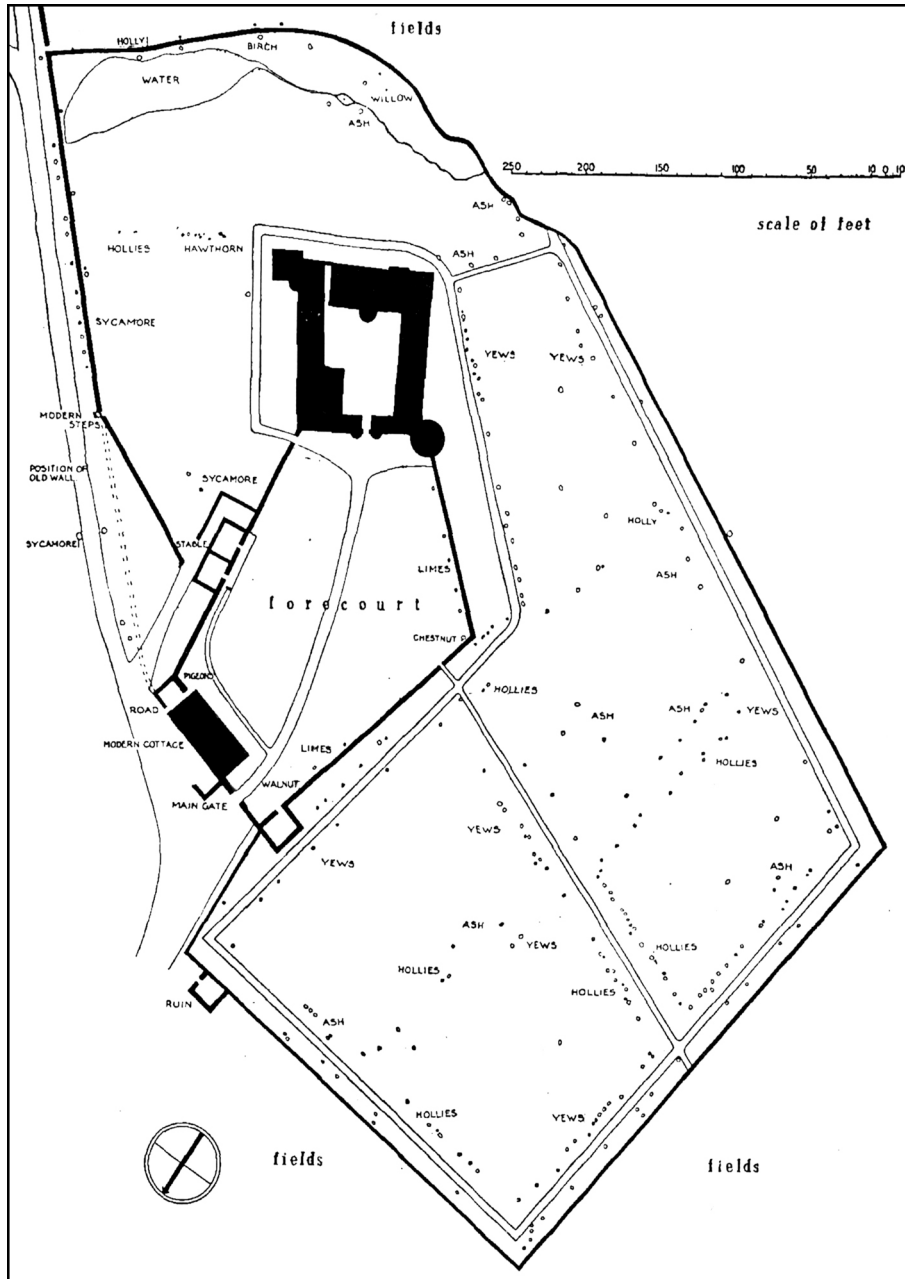


Figure 4: 'Tolquhon Castle and it's Builder' by W.D.Simpson (PSAS Vol.72 1937-38, Fig.14)

LIST OF CONTEXTS

No.	Description
101	Turf.
102	Slate and mid-brown silt below 101.
103	Sub-angular stone in compact mid-brown silt levelling.
104	Yellowish-brown clay surface with sub-angular stones.
105	Possible buried path of sub-angular stones set in 104.
106	Disturbed ground to NE of 105 - silt with modern pottery and glass.
107	BT cable.
108	Cut for BT cable.
109	Sand and gravel path make-up.
110	Layer of sub-angular stones and gravel, possible feature.

LIST OF DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHS

No.	Description	Facing	Date
1	Pre-excavation shot of Ticket Office and location of drainage trench.	ENE	28/02/2011
2	Pre-excavation shot of cottage and path.	E	28/02/2011
3	Work in progress.	NE	28/02/2011
4	Work in progress.	NNE	28/02/2011
5	Path with drain at side of Ticket Office.	NNE	28/02/2011
6	Drain at side of Ticket Office.	NNE	28/02/2011
7	Stone and clay surface 104.	SE	28/02/2011
8	Stone and clay surface 104.	SE	28/02/2011
9	Stone and clay surface 104.	NE	28/02/2011
10	Contexts 103 and 104.	SW	28/02/2011
11	Shot of context 103.	NE	28/02/2011
12	Possible buried path 105 below context 103.	SE	28/02/2011
13	Possible buried path 105 below context 103.	NE	28/02/2011
14	BT cable at NE end of trench.	SW	28/02/2011
15	SW end of Trench through path 109.	SW	28/02/2011
16	Post-excavation shot of Trench.	ENE	28/02/2011
17	Post-excavation shot of Trench, SW end.	E	28/02/2011
18	Shot of path make-up.	S	28/02/2011
19	Post-excavation shot of Trench.	NE	28/02/2011
20	Post-excavation shot of Trench.	ESE	28/02/2011
21	Post-excavation shot of Trench.	SE	28/02/2011
22	Possible buried path 105.	NE	28/02/2011
23	Possible buried path 105.	SE	28/02/2011

No.	Description	Facing	Date
24	Post-excavation shot of Trench.	SW	28/02/2011
25	Post-excavation shot of Trench.	SW	28/02/2011
26	Clay Surface 104 and Path 105	NW	28/02/2011

LIST OF DRAWINGS

No.	Description	Scale
1	Plan of Trench.	1:50
2	Representative section of Trench.	1:20

LIST OF DIGITAL SMALL FINDS

No.	Description	Type	Trench	Context
SF001	Green-glaze body sherd.	Pottery	1	104