

**HISTORIC SCOTLAND PROPERTIES IN CARE
MINOR ARCHAEOLOGICAL WORKS 2014/2015**

Cardoness Castle • Excavation • February 2014

HS PIC Index Number: 90058

SITE: Cardoness Castle, Dumfries and Galloway

N.G.R.: Centred c NX 5907 5530

DESCRIPTION: Excavation of five trenches to accommodate handrails flanking portions of the steep access path to the castle.

PROJECT CODE: HSCO-90058-2014-01

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4 Western Terrace, Murrayfield, Edinburgh EH12 5QF

MARCH 2014

INTRODUCTION

Under the terms of its PIC contract with Historic Scotland, Kirkdale Archaeology was asked to undertake the excavation of five trenches flanking the access path to Cardoness Castle in Kirkcudbrightshire (Fig.1). The path winds roughly NE/SW up a steep hill from the access gate next to the cottage/ticket office to the summit of a hill where it gives access to the tower and its subsidiary structures. In order to aid the steep approach to the castle, handrails were to be installed at five different points on the SE side of the path to help the climb up the five short flights of stairs. As the area surrounding the castle was considered to be of high archaeological potential, the trenches were manually excavated by archaeologists ahead of the installation of the handrails by Historic Scotland staff.

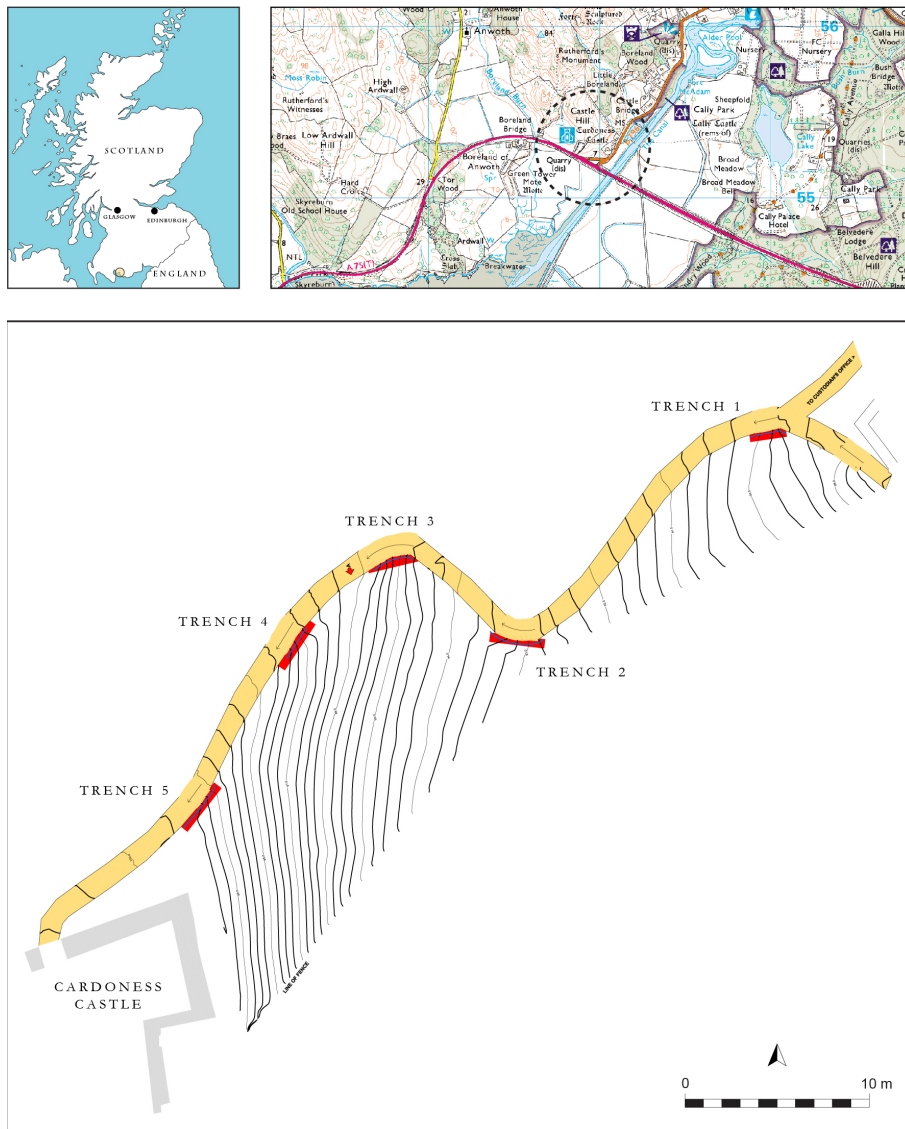


Figure 1: Plan showing the location of Trenches 1 - 5
Inset No. 2 © Crown copyright. All rights reserved 2014. Licence number 100036933.

The work took place between 18 - 19 February 2014.

DESCRIPTION

Trench 1

Trench 1 measured 2m NE/SW x 0.5m wide NW/SE x 0.45m deep. This trench sat at the base of the hill near the entrance gate at the first turn in the path served by stairs. The modern turf and mid-brown silty topsoil **101** was 14cm thick and capped a 26cm thick compact landscaping layer of yellowish grey re-deposited clay **102** with numerous angular pieces of schist <15cm. Below this (to the SW) was a layer of clean brown silt **103** at least 5cm thick (only partially excavated), probably a layer of hill wash. This in turn covered a compact mixed layer of natural, comprising light brown sand with numerous small sherds of angular schist **104**. Contexts **102** - **104** had been truncated by a steep angled cut **105** for the insertion of the current path, suggesting that it post-dates the landscaping of the slope and possibly implying that it replaced an earlier path in the same position.



Plate 1: Post-excavation shot of Trench 1

Trench 2

Trench 2 measured 3m NE/SW x 0.5m wide NW/SE x 0.45m deep. This trench sat a short distance up the hill SW of Trench 1, at the second turn in the path served by stairs. The modern turf and mid-brown silty topsoil **201** was 12cm thick and capped a 28cm thick compact landscaping layer of yellowish grey re-deposited clay **202** with numerous angular pieces of schist <20cm. Below this was a compact mixed layer of natural comprising orange-brown iron-rich sand **203** with numerous small sherds of angular schist (the top 5cm of this layer was excavated). To the NE the trench could only achieve a depth of 35cm as bedrock **204** was cropping-out in the lower portion of the trench (around 70cm NE/SW). Contexts **202** and **203** had been truncated by a steep angled cut **205** for the insertion of the current path, again suggesting that it post-dates the landscaping of the slope.

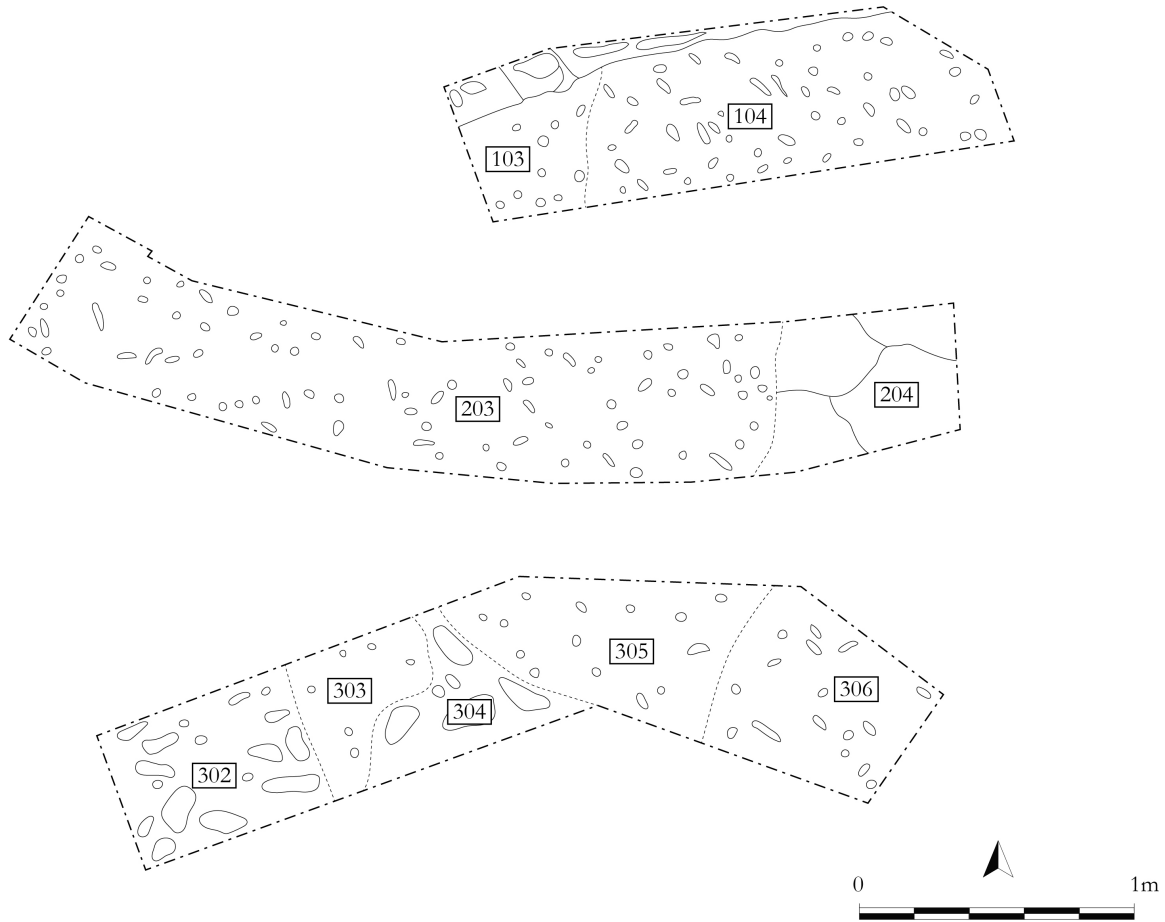


Figure 2: Post-excavation plans of trenches 1 - 3 (1, top; 2, middle)

Trench 3

Trench 3 measured 3m NE/SW x 0.5m wide NW/SE x 0.45m deep. This trench sat a short distance up the hill NW of Trench 2 at the third turn in the path served by stairs. The modern turf and mid-brown silty topsoil **301** was 12cm thick and capped a moderately compact landscaping layer of yellowish grey re-deposited clay **302** with numerous angular pieces of schist <20cm. Below this, towards the NE, was a layer of yellowish brown mortar **303** c.2-10cm thick on which the adjacent stair had been built. The cut for the insertion of this stair was therefore wider than that for the previous two trenches, and presumably lay a short distance SE of the SE trench edge. Below **303** was an earlier levelling layer of voided schist pieces <20cm in a loose matrix of mid-brown silt **304**. It is perhaps the voided nature of this layer that, when encountered, forced the builders to level and seal it with **303**. This had been laid over a c.10cm thick layer of mid-brown silt containing numerous angled sherds of schist **305**, which was flecked with charcoal and contained a broken glass bottle base of likely 19th century date (**SF001**). This sealed a natural layer of compact orange-brown iron-rich sand **306** with numerous small sherds of angular schist.

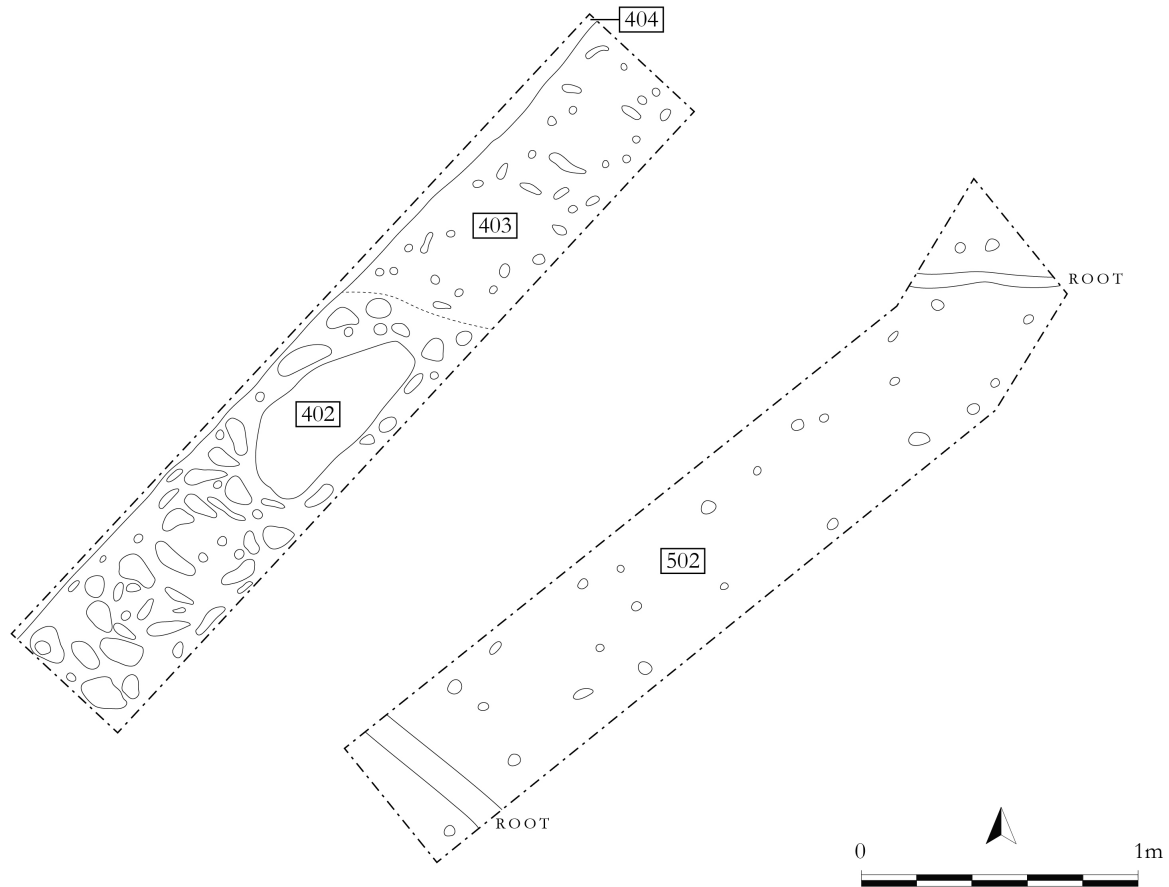


Figure 3: Post-excavation plan of Trench 4 (left) and Trench 5

Trench 4

Trench 4 measured 3m NE/SW x 0.5m wide NW/SE x 0.45m deep. This trench sat a short distance up the hill SW of Trench 3 at the fourth turn in the path served by the stairs. The modern turf and mid-brown silty topsoil **401** was 16cm thick and capped a compact landscaping layer of voided yellowish grey re-deposited clay **402** with numerous medium-large angular pieces of schist <55cm. The layer was at least 29cm deep to the SW and was not bottomed. Below this to the NE was a compact mixed layer of yellowish brown sandy gravel **403** with numerous small angular pieces of schist <8cm. Within **403** was an iron nail with a wide flared head and square sectioned shaft (**SF002**). Contexts **402** and **403** had been truncated by a steep angled cut **404** for the insertion of the current path, again suggesting that it post-dates the landscaping of the slope possibly meaning that it replaced an earlier path in the same position. Context **403** was only partially excavated but may represent another phase of landscaping/levelling or an earlier ground surface, and has strong archaeological potential.

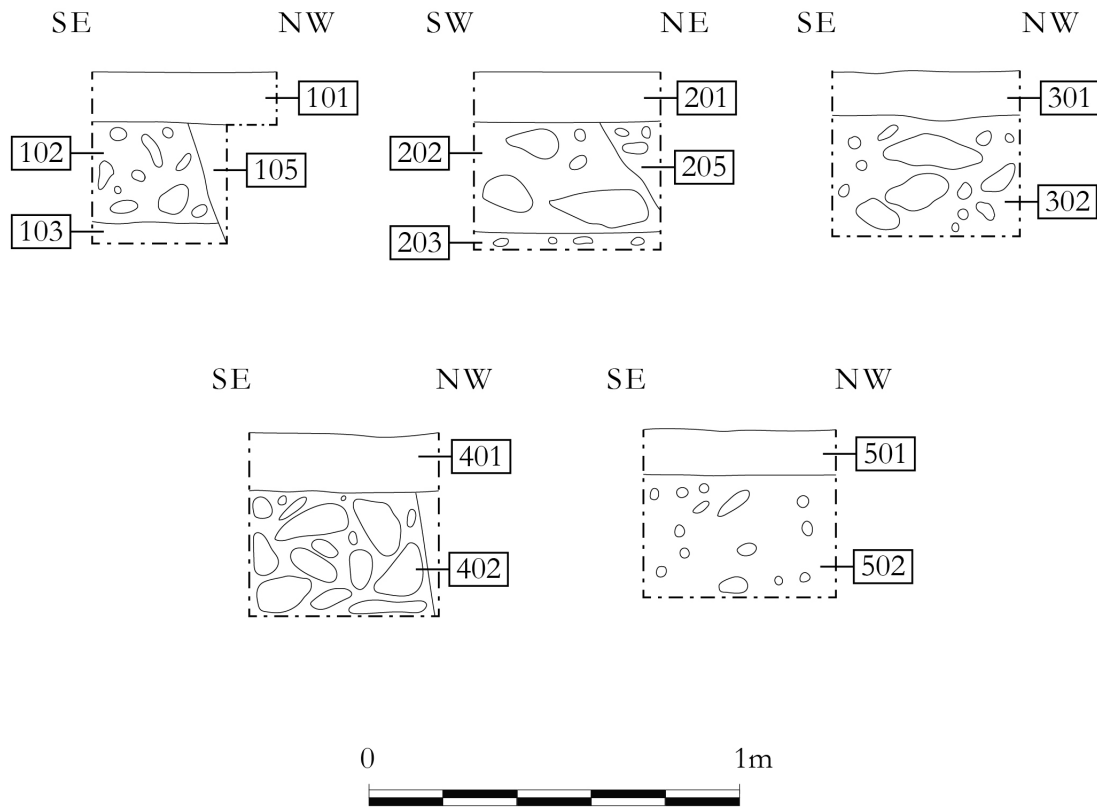


Figure 4: Clockwise from top-left: Trench 1, NE-facing section; Trench 2, SE-facing section; Trench 3, NE-facing section; Trench 4, NE-facing section; Trench 5, NE-facing section;

Trench 5

Trench 5 measured 3m NE/SW x 0.5m wide NW/SE x 0.45m deep. This trench sat a short distance up the hill SW of Trench 4, at the final turn in the path served by stairs at the top of the slope. The modern turf and mid-brown silty topsoil **501** was 12cm thick and capped a compact landscaping layer of gravelly mid-brown silt **502** with numerous medium sized angular pieces of schist <15cm. The layer was at least 33cm deep and was not bottomed. Context **502** also contained numerous roots, with larger ones to the NE and SW which could not be removed. There was no visible cut for the stair, the implication being that the stair and the levelling represented by **502** were contemporary. This in turn suggests that the summit was subject to general landscaping when the stair was installed.

CONCLUSIONS

Although little of archaeological interest was uncovered during this particular period of work, the sensitive nature of the site and its high archaeological potential suggests that any further ground-breaking works should be accompanied by an archaeological watching brief. There are clearly layers ranging from bedrock, natural sediments and hill wash to periods of landscaping and levelling, all of which may better inform our understanding of the development of the site.

LIST OF CONTEXTS

No.	Description
101	Turf and mid-brown topsoil
102	Levelling/landscaping layer of yellowish grey clay with angular pieces of schist
103	Clean mid-brown silt
104	Natural light-brown sand with numerous small pieces of angular schist
105	Cut through 102 - 104 for path
201	Turf and mid-brown topsoil
202	Levelling/landscaping layer of yellowish grey clay with angular pieces of schist
203	Natural orange-brown sand with numerous small pieces of angular schist
204	Bedrock
205	Cut through 202 and 203 for path
301	Turf and mid-brown topsoil
302	Levelling/landscaping layer of yellowish grey clay with angular pieces of schist
303	Layer of yellowish-brown mortar
304	Levelling layer of voided pieces of angular schist in a matrix of loose mid-brown silt
305	Layer of mid-brown silt with small angular pieces of schist
306	Natural orange-brown sand with numerous small pieces of angular schist
401	Turf and mid-brown topsoil
402	Levelling/landscaping layer of yellowish grey clay with angular pieces of schist
403	Yellowish brown sandy gravel
404	Cut through 402 and 403 for path
501	Turf and mid-brown topsoil
502	Gravelly mid-brown silt levelling layer with numerous pieces of medium sized angular schist

LIST OF DRAWINGS

No.	Type	Description	Scale
1	Plan	Trench 1	1:20
2	Section	NE-facing, Trench 1	1:20
3	Plan	Trench 2	1:20
4	Section	SE-facing, Trench 2	1:20
5	Plan	Trench 3	1:20
6	Section	NE-facing, Trench 3	1:20
7	Plan	Trench 4	1:20
8	Section	NE-facing, Trench 4	1:20
9	Plan	Trench 5	1:20
10	Section	NE-facing, Trench 5	1:20

LIST OF DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHS

No.	Description	From	Date
1	Pre-excavation shot looking up-slope	NE	18/2/2014
2	Pre-excavation shot looking down-slope	SW	18/2/2014
3	Pre-excavation shot looking down-slope	SW	18/2/2014
4	General post-excavation shot of Trenches 1, 4 and 5 looking down-slope	SW	18/2/2014
5	General post-excavation shot of Trenches 1, 4 and 5 looking down-slope	SW	18/2/2014
6	View of the Bay of Fleet from the tower battlements	NE	19/2/2014
7	Post-excavation shot of Trench 1	NE	19/2/2014
8	Post-excavation shot of Trench 1	SE	19/2/2014
9	Post-excavation shot of Trench 2	NE	19/2/2014
10	Post-excavation shot of Trench 2	SE	19/2/2014
11	Post-excavation shot of Trench 3	NE	19/2/2014
12	Post-excavation shot of Trench 3	SE	19/2/2014
13	Post-excavation shot of Trench 4	NE	19/2/2014
14	Post-excavation shot of Trench 4	SE	19/2/2014
15	Post-excavation shot of Trench 4	SE	19/2/2014
16	Post-excavation shot of Trench 5	NE	19/2/2014
17	Post-excavation shot of Trench 5	SE	19/2/2014

LIST OF SMALL FINDS

No.	Trench	Context	Description
SF001	3	305	Green glass base shard from a bottle
SF002	4	403	Iron nail with wide flared head and square-sectioned shaft