

# Discovery and Excavation in Scotland

Updated on 15/06/2007

<b>LOCAL AUTHORITY:</b>	Edinburgh, City of
<b>PROJECT TITLE/SITE NAME:</b>	Edinburgh Castle: Mons Meg
<b>PROJECT CODE:</b>	HSCO-90130-2012-01
<b>PARISH:</b>	Edinburgh, City of
<b>NAME OF CONTRIBUTOR:</b>	Gordon Ewart
<b>NAME OF ORGANISATION:</b>	Kirkdale Archaeology
<b>TYPE(S) OF PROJECT:</b>	Watching brief
<b>NMRS NO(S):</b>	NT27SE 1.01
<b>SITE/MONUMENT TYPE(S):</b>	Castle / Cannon
<b>SIGNIFICANT FINDS:</b>	
<b>NGR</b> (2 letters, 8 or 10 figures)	NT 2515 7351
<b>START DATE</b> (this season)	19 March 2012
<b>END DATE</b> (this season)	19 March 2012
<b>PREVIOUS WORK</b> (incl. <i>DES</i> ref.)	
<b>MAIN (NARRATIVE) DESCRIPTION:</b> (May include information from other fields)	<p>Archaeological recording was undertaken of the deposits revealed during the removal of a series of stone steps near to Mons Meg, at Edinburgh Castle. The steps provided access to the E side of the battery presently occupied by the late medieval gun. In advance of the replacement of new steps, an area measuring 5m x 1.9m was recorded. The results of this work appear to reveal aspects of the 1894 programme of landscaping (in terms of the residual evidence of the steps), by which time the northern part of the inner curtain wall had been demolished leaving a grassy slope above the cliff. The origins of a truncated platform, however, may be considerably older. The creation of the platform (as depicted on an early 18<sup>th</sup>-century plan) may be the result of simply truncating and/or levelling the upper surface of an earlier earthwork, already <i>in situ</i>.</p>
<b>PROPOSED FUTURE WORK:</b>	
<b>CAPTION(S) FOR ILLUSTRS:</b>	
<b>SPONSOR OR FUNDING BODY:</b>	Historic Scotland
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<b>ARCHIVE LOCATION</b>	Archive to be deposited in NMRS

**HISTORIC SCOTLAND PROPERTIES IN CARE  
MINOR ARCHAEOLOGICAL WORKS 2012**

**Edinburgh Castle: Excavation, March 2012**

**HS PIC Index Number: 90130**

**SITE:** Edinburgh Castle

**N.G.R.:** NT 2515 7351

**DESCRIPTION:** Archaeological recording associated with the removal of a series  
of stone steps near Mons Meg

**PROJECT CODE:** HSCO-90130-2012-01

<b>CONTENTS:</b>	Introduction.....	1
	Description.....	1
	Conclusions.....	3
	List of Contexts.....	6
	List of Digital Photographs.....	6



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**M A R C H 2 0 1 2**

## **INTRODUCTION**

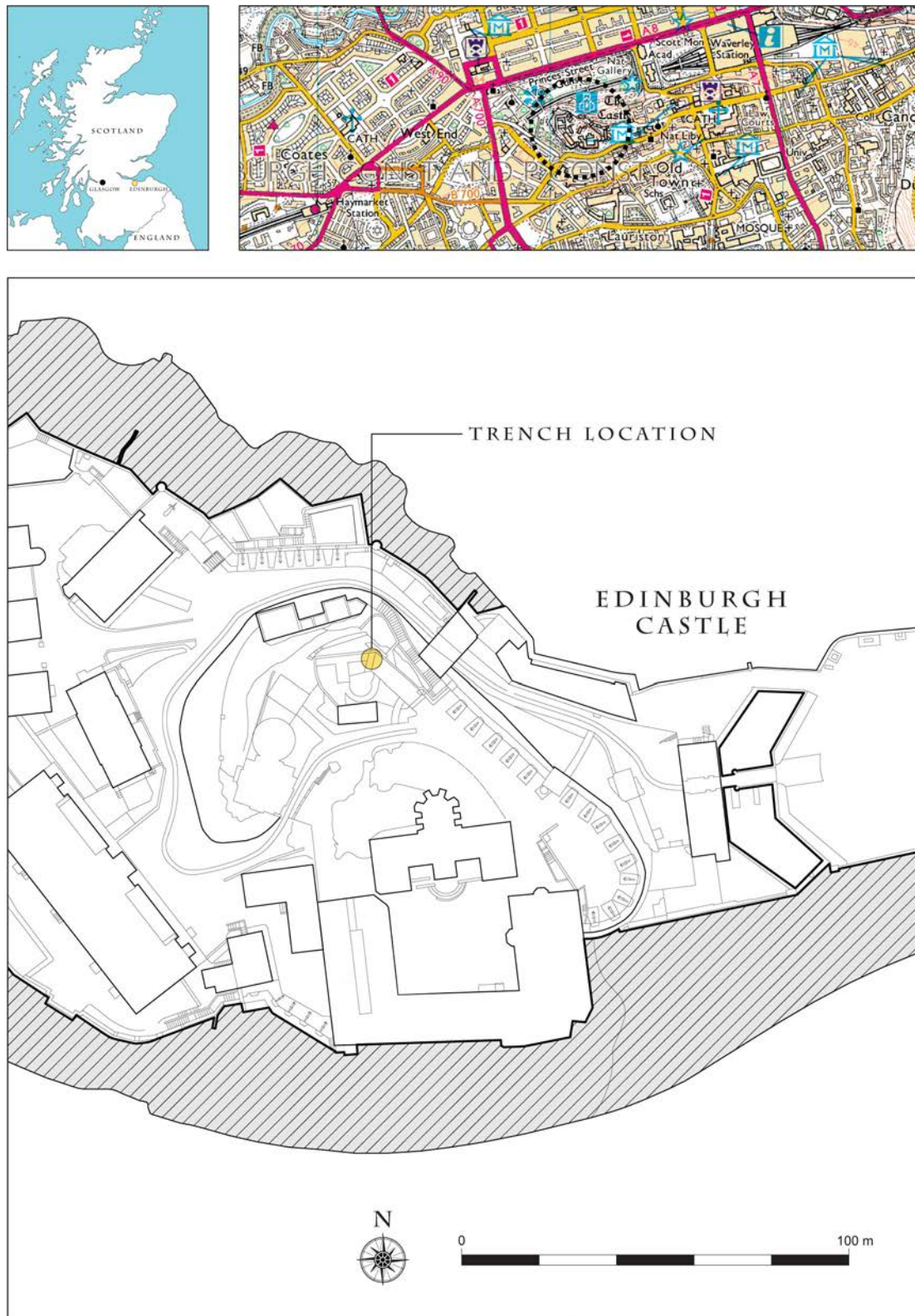
Under the terms of its Properties-In-Care (PIC) call-off contract with Historic Scotland, Kirkdale Archaeology was requested to undertake the archaeological recording of the deposits revealed during the removal of a series of stone steps near to Mons Meg, at Edinburgh Castle (Fig.1). The steps provided access to the E side of the battery presently occupied by the late medieval gun. In advance of the replacement of new steps, an area measuring 5m x 1.9m was recorded (Fig.2)

The work took place on 19<sup>th</sup> March 2012.

## **DESCRIPTION**

The trench comprised the E-facing (sloping) profile of a substantial earth deposit (**002**), with residual evidence of an earlier series of stone steps (**005**). The latter comprised fragmentary stone alignments set in a sandy matrix (**003**), reflecting the footings of a flight of four steps rising up from a consolidated, concreted surface (**001**) to the Mons Meg gun platform. The uppermost step footings lay at a depth of 0.27m below the gun platform, which in turn lay 0.55m below the top of the N parapet wall.

The earth deposit **002** had been cut or crudely terraced to receive the **005** features, and stood approximately 1.2m high above **001**. Context **002** was assessed via a shallow sondage (0.3m deep) located towards the central section of the exposed E slope, in order to confirm the complexity of the deposit. This revealed that the overall earthwork featured several layers, with one large major deposit approximately 1m deep, overlying at least two further, shallower, deposits (0.1m deep), towards the base (as exposed, although the full depth of the overall deposit was not defined below context **001**).



**Figure 1:** Plan showing the location of Edinburgh Castle and the excavated area near Mons Meg.  
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## CONCLUSIONS

The results of this work appears to reveal aspects of the 1894 programme of landscaping (in terms of the residual evidence of the steps 005), by which time the northern part of the inner curtain wall had been demolished leaving a grassy slope above the cliff (Fig.4). The origins of 002, however, may be considerably older.

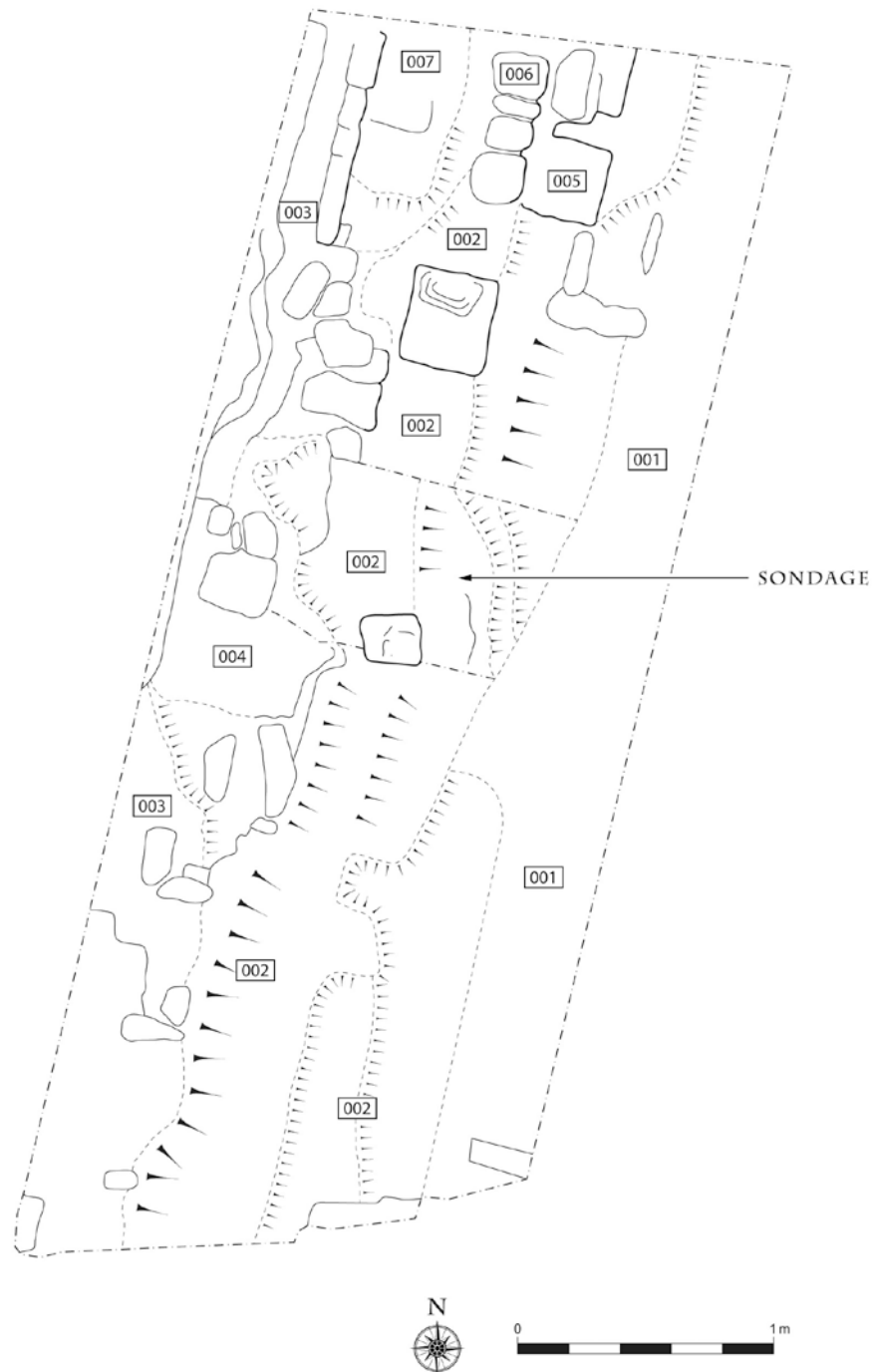
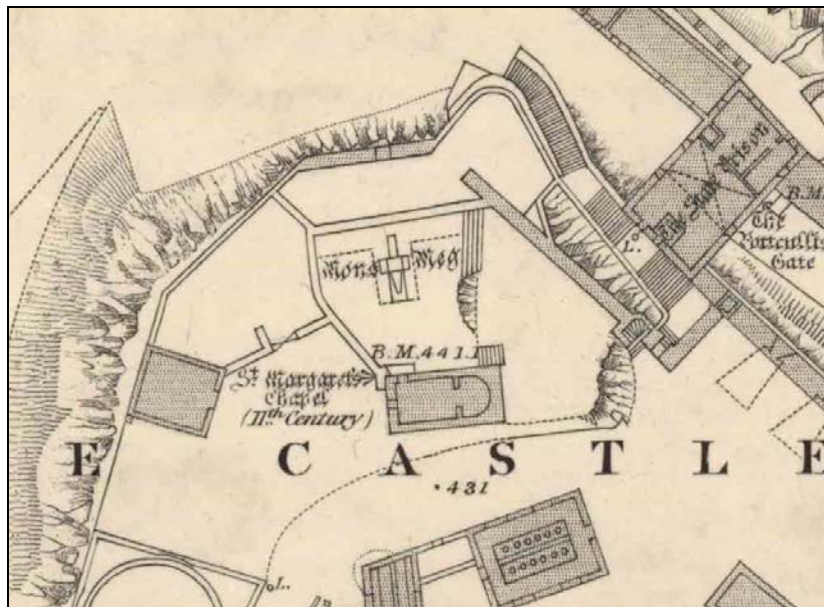


Figure 2: Post-excavation plan of the trench



**Figure 3:** Residual evidence of the earlier stone steps (005)



**Figure 4:** Ordnance Survey plan of 1877.  
(OS 1877 Ordnance Survey Town Plan of Edinburgh, 1:1056)

The creation of the platform (as depicted in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, Fig.5) may be reflected by the upper part of 002, imported on to the site, or equally it may be the result of simply truncating and/or levelling the upper surface of an earlier earthwork, already *in situ*.



The abruptly stepped profile of the bedrock profile, to the N , which defines the N limit of the terrace exploited by St Margaret's Chapel, clearly shows the need for levelling around the rather limited area of the exposed bedrock head. As no dating evidence was found within any part of 002, the possibility that it could represent earlier, medieval activity around the 'Citadel' seems plausible, and at the very least reflects 17<sup>th</sup> century landscaping and/or levelling.



**Figure 5:** Dury's plan of 1707. (*Dury, Theodore 1709 Plan of the Works proposed to be made at the Castle of Edinburgh NLS MS.1649 Z.03/58b*)

## LIST OF CONTEXTS

No.	Description
001	Hard standing / concreted surface immediately E of 002 / 005
002	A massive, complex deposit of imported light brown to dark brown silt and small stones, standing to a height of approximately 1.2m
003	A shallow sandy matrix containing fragments of mortar; bedding for step footings 005 – not excavated
004	Similar to 003, only more mixed with darker soils – not excavated
005	A series of four fragmentary alignments of laid, flat sandstone slabs, set in 003, and aligned roughly N/S. They represent the footings for an earlier flight of stone steps, recycled as the footings for the most recent ones

## LIST OF DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHS

No.	Description	From	Date
01	Trench, post-excavation	S	19/03/2012
02	Trench, post-excavation	S	19/03/2012
03	Trench, post-excavation	N	19/03/2012
04	Trench, S end, post-excavation	W	19/03/2012
05	Trench, N-end, post-excavation	W	19/03/2012
06	Trench, N-end, post-excavation	S	19/03/2012
07	Trench, N-end, post-excavation	E	19/03/2012
08	Trench, N-end, post-excavation	NE	19/03/2012
09	Trench, S end, post-excavation	E	19/03/2012
10	Trench, central area, post-excavation	E	19/03/2012
11	Trench, central area, post-excavation	E	19/03/2012
12	Trench, N-end, post-excavation	E	19/03/2012
13	Trench, N-end, post-excavation	E	19/03/2012
14	General view	E	19/03/2012
15	General view	E	19/03/2012