

Discovery and Excavation in Scotland

Updated on 15/06/2007

LOCAL AUTHORITY:	Edinburgh, City of
PROJECT TITLE/SITE NAME:	Edinburgh Castle: Upper Citadel
PROJECT CODE:	HSCO-90130-2012-02
PARISH:	Edinburgh, City of
NAME OF CONTRIBUTOR:	David Murray
NAME OF ORGANISATION:	Kirkdale Archaeology
TYPE(S) OF PROJECT:	Watching brief
NMRS NO(S):	NT27SE 1 / NT27SE 1.03
SITE/MONUMENT TYPE(S):	Castle
SIGNIFICANT FINDS:	
NGR (2 letters, 8 or 10 figures)	NT 2513 7351
START DATE (this season)	25 May 2012
END DATE (this season)	25 May 2012
PREVIOUS WORK (incl. <i>DES</i> ref.)	
MAIN (NARRATIVE) DESCRIPTION: (May include information from other fields)	<p>A small excavation was carried out at Edinburgh Castle ahead of the erection of a new flag pole on the N side of the upper citadel of the Castle.</p> <p>This small scale excavation revealed a surprising depth of deposits below the modern paving. The upper deposit contained handmade brick fragments, and so is likely to be 18th century or later in date. Prior to the 19th-century restoration of St. Margaret's Chapel, it was used as a gunner's store, and depictions exist showing an apparent yard on its W side.</p> <p>The basal deposit produced a small but fine assemblage of broadly medieval pottery. The presence of a large base sherd indicates relatively undisturbed material.</p> <p>The small trench at this location in the castle has suggested that there is the potential for significant archaeological deposits in this locale. The proximity of St. Margaret's Chapel, and of the cliff line which is always likely to have been used as a part of the upper defences of the Castle, highlights the need for archaeological monitoring of any future ground breaking works in this area.</p>
PROPOSED FUTURE WORK:	
CAPTION(S) FOR ILLUSTRS:	
SPONSOR OR FUNDING BODY:	Historic Scotland
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ARCHIVE LOCATION	Archive to be deposited in NMRS

HISTORIC SCOTLAND PROPERTIES IN CARE
MINOR ARCHAEOLOGICAL WORKS 2012

Edinburgh Castle: Excavation, May 2012

HS PIC Index Number: 90130

SITE: Edinburgh Castle, Edinburgh

N.G.R.: NT 2513 7351

DESCRIPTION: Excavation of a small trench to house a new flag pole

PROJECT CODE: HSCO-90130-2012-02

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JUNE 2012

INTRODUCTION

Under the terms of its Properties-In-Care (PIC) call-off contract with Historic Scotland, Kirkdale Archaeology was asked to undertake a small excavation at Edinburgh Castle ahead of the erection of a new flag pole on the N side of the upper citadel of the Castle, overlooking Princess Street gardens (Fig.1).

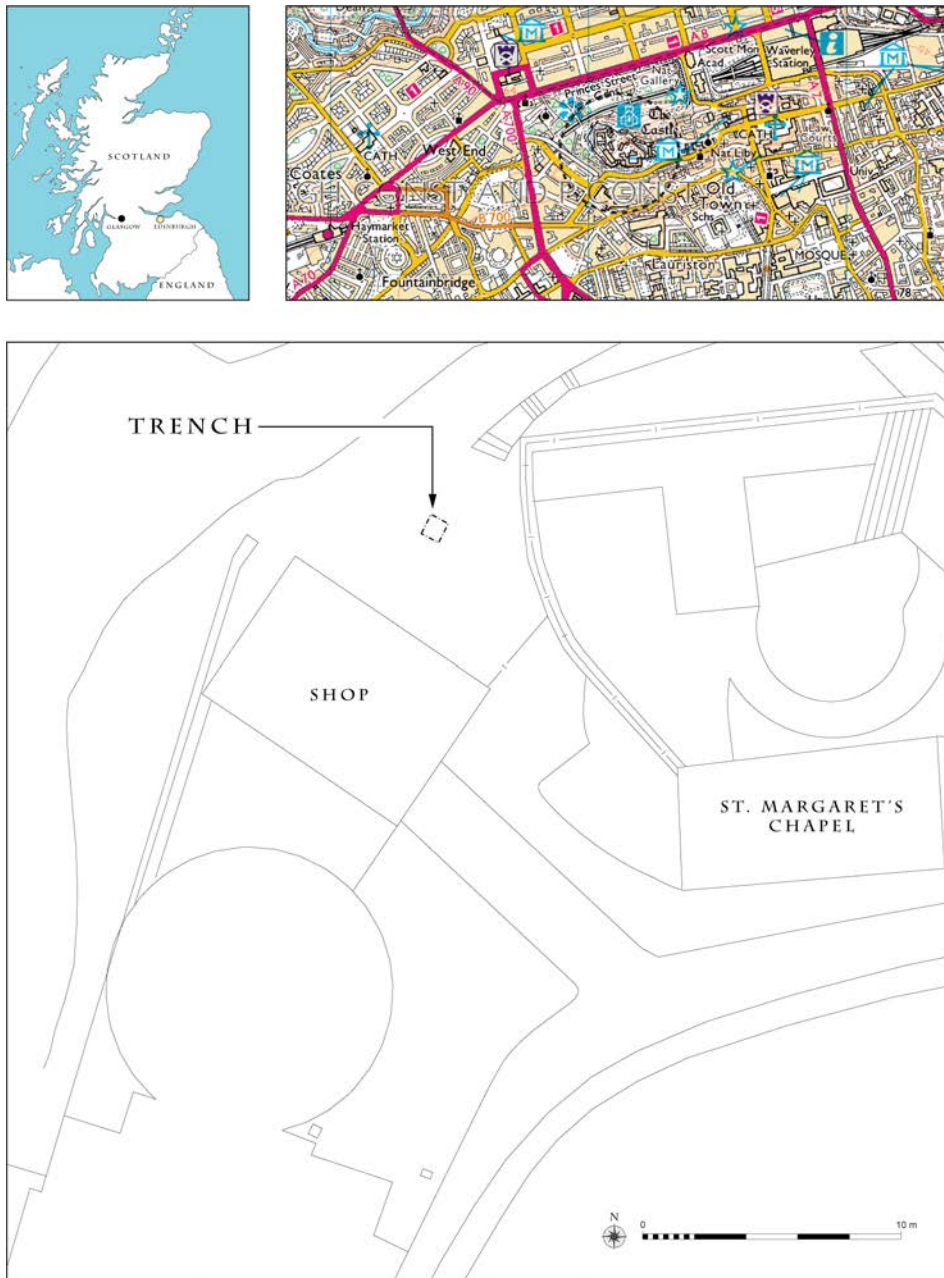


Figure 1: Plan showing the location of Edinburgh Castle, and the area of works.
Inset Nos. 2 © Crown copyright. All rights reserved 2012. Licence number 100036933.

The area of the excavation was in an irregular open space formed by the castle bookshop (a 19th century structure) to the W, a low cliff line (with a modern fence line at its top) to the N and the retaining wall to the platform that Mons Meg is currently sited on, to the E. It is open to the S and the area is paved, something that was installed in the last 20 years.

The area is undoubtedly of archaeological significance, with St. Margaret's Chapel (the oldest upstanding building in the castle) a short distance to the SE, and a curious gap in the defences that run around the low cliff on the N and W sides of the upper citadel of the Castle (a gap that is filled today by a metal fence line). The bedrock is evident at various points nearby, most obviously under St. Margaret's Chapel, coming out from under its W wall and sloping down sharply to the SW, so that the floor of the chapel is perhaps 1.5m above the area of excavation. The slabs covered all trace of rock in the area of the trench, while to the N it appears again to form the cliff line separating the upper and lower terraces of the Castle, although perhaps 1m below the level of the flagstones.

All excavation work was carried out by hand, and the work took place on 25th May 2012.

DESCRIPTION

On arrival, a single paving slab had already been lifted exposing an area measuring 0.78m NE/SW by 0.68m NW/SE. These slabs (100) proved to overlie 0.2m of red whin dust (101) which was very compacted. The removal of 101 exposed 102, a compact deposit of dark grey silt very rich in sandstone rubble and mortar fragments, and with some slate and handmade brick fragments throughout. Context 102 was 0.3m thick and sealed 103, a fine pale grey silt rich in charcoal flecks and with some chunks of dolerite and mortar flecks throughout. Context 103 was excavated to a depth of 0.3m without reaching its base, and produced a small but interesting ceramic assemblage.

The excavation reached the required depth of 0.9m without encountering any further archaeological deposits.

CONCLUSIONS

This small scale excavation revealed a surprising depth of deposits below the modern paving. The upper deposit 102 contained handmade brick fragments, and so is likely to be 18th century or later in date. Prior to the 19th century restoration of St. Margaret's Chapel, it was used as a gunner's store, and depictions exist showing an apparent yard on its W side. Context 102 may relate to this activity, although in such a small trench it is uncertain how exactly. Most likely is that context 102 is either a construction (levelling) deposit below the yard, or relates to its 19th century destruction and remodelling.

The basal deposit 103 was excavated to a depth of 0.3m without bottoming out, and produced a small but fine assemblage of broadly medieval pottery. Again the small scale of the excavation limits interpretation, but at present there is no reason to doubt its medieval date. The presence of the large base sherd (SF001) indicates relatively undisturbed material, and suggests that there may be at least a pocket of well-preserved archaeology here.

The small trench at this location in the castle has suggested that there is the potential for significant archaeological deposits in this locale. The proximity of the early royal St. Margaret's Chapel, and of the cliff line which is always likely to have been used as a part of the upper defences of the Castle, highlights the need for archaeological monitoring of any future ground breaking works in this area.

LIST OF CONTEXTS

No.	Description
101	Flagstone surface
102	Whin dust under 100
103	Rubble rich dark grey silt
104	Pale grey fine silt

LIST OF DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHS

No.	Description	From	Date
01	Slab 100 lifted	SW	15/05/2012
02	Slab 100 lifted	SE	15/05/2012
03	SW-facing section of trench as finished	SW	15/05/2012
04	SW-facing section of trench as finished	SW	15/05/2012
05	SW-facing section of trench as finished	SW	15/05/2012
06	Trench as finished	SE	15/05/2012

LIST OF DRAWINGS

No.	Type	Description	Scale
01	Plan	Location of trench	1:50

LIST OF FINDS

No.	Type	Description	Context
001	Ceramic	1 large body/ basal sherd (95mm x 100mm). External patchy light green glaze over light orange ware. Grey (slip?) internally	103
002	Ceramic	1 body sherd from external green glazed vessel (jug?) with 'nose' (part of face mask) and hatched decoration. Grey fabric with creamy coloured slip (?) on interior	103
003	Ceramic	2 small sherds of an unglazed, fine walled vessel. White (slip?) inside and out, over grey, reduced ware	103
004	Ceramic	1 small body sherd with transparent glaze over a slightly pink fabric	103
005	Ceramic	1 sherd from 'thin' platter (?) 3mm thick grey fabric with red/brown green external glaze	103
006	Ceramic	1 body sherd from reduced ware jug with external green (some pink) patchy glaze	103
007	Ceramic	1 small body sherd with external green glaze and creamy interior (slip?) over grey ware	103
008	Ceramic	1 body sherd from an unglazed (but slightly burnished pinkish exterior) vessel over grey ware	103

The exclusively medieval (15thC – 16thC) character of this assemblage, the range and quality of vessels represented, and the limited scale of the excavation itself, suggests that this is an unusually rich deposit, which does not appear, at this stage, to have been massively

disturbed. The evidence from the removal of the Mons Meg Steps and this exercise suggests that significant medieval occupation evidence survives as the infill over bedrock in the general area of St Margarets Chapel, albeit likely to be redeposited as levelling/landscaping.