

## *Discovery and Excavation in Scotland*

Updated on 15/06/2007

<b>LOCAL AUTHORITY:</b>	Edinburgh, City Of
<b>PROJECT TITLE/SITE NAME:</b>	Palace of Holyroodhouse (Gardens)
<b>PROJECT CODE:</b>	HSCO-90131-2012-02
<b>PARISH:</b>	Edinburgh, City Of
<b>NAME OF CONTRIBUTOR:</b>	David Murray
<b>NAME OF ORGANISATION:</b>	Kirkdale Archaeology
<b>TYPE(S) OF PROJECT:</b>	Watching Brief
<b>NMRS NO(S):</b>	NT27SE 35.00; NT27SE 197
<b>SITE/MONUMENT TYPE(S):</b>	Palace; Park
<b>SIGNIFICANT FINDS:</b>	None
<b>NGR (2 letters, 8 or 10 figures)</b>	NT 2694 7404
<b>START DATE (this season)</b>	16 May 2012
<b>END DATE (this season)</b>	24 May 2012
<b>PREVIOUS WORK (incl. <i>DES</i> ref.)</b>	
<b>MAIN (NARRATIVE) DESCRIPTION:</b> (May include information from other fields)	<p>In advance of the planting of a tree, a small excavation was carried out in the north garden of the Palace of Holyroodhouse to assess the immediate area. It was anticipated that any surrounding archaeological features and deposits were likely to be affected by root damage in the future.</p> <p>Deposits revealed appeared to be mostly dumped material for levelling and landscaping. A substantial quantity of bone, some of which was certainly human was noted, along with much mortar and some sandstone rubble. Other finds were few, but as well as late medieval pottery this included 19<sup>th</sup>-century material. As the Abbey cemetery is known to lie to the north of the Abbey, this seems to indicate that this material is derived from there. Today the gardens present a fairly flat appearance, with no evidence for activity such as quarrying. It is possible that the ruinous east end of the Abbey, excavated in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, was landscaped in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the resulting debris dumped here.</p>
<b>PROPOSED FUTURE WORK:</b>	
<b>CAPTION(S) FOR ILLUSTRS:</b>	
<b>SPONSOR OR FUNDING BODY:</b>	Historic Scotland
<b>ADDRESS OF MAIN CONTRIBUTOR:</b>	4, Western Terrace, Edinburgh, EH12 5QF
<b>EMAIL ADDRESS:</b>	g_ewart@hotmail.com
<b>ARCHIVE LOCATION (intended/deposited)</b>	Archive to be deposited in NMRS

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

**Holyrood Palace: Excavation, May 2012**

**HS PIC Index Number: 90131**

**SITE:** Palace of Holyroodhouse, Edinburgh

**N.G.R.:** NT 2694 7404

**DESCRIPTION:** Excavation ahead of the planting of a commemorative tree in the  
N garden of Holyrood Palace

**PROJECT CODE:** HSCO-90131-2012-01

<b>CONTENTS:</b>	Introduction.....	1
	Description.....	2
	Conclusions.....	5
	List of Contexts.....	7
	List of Digital Photographs.....	7
	List of Drawings.....	8

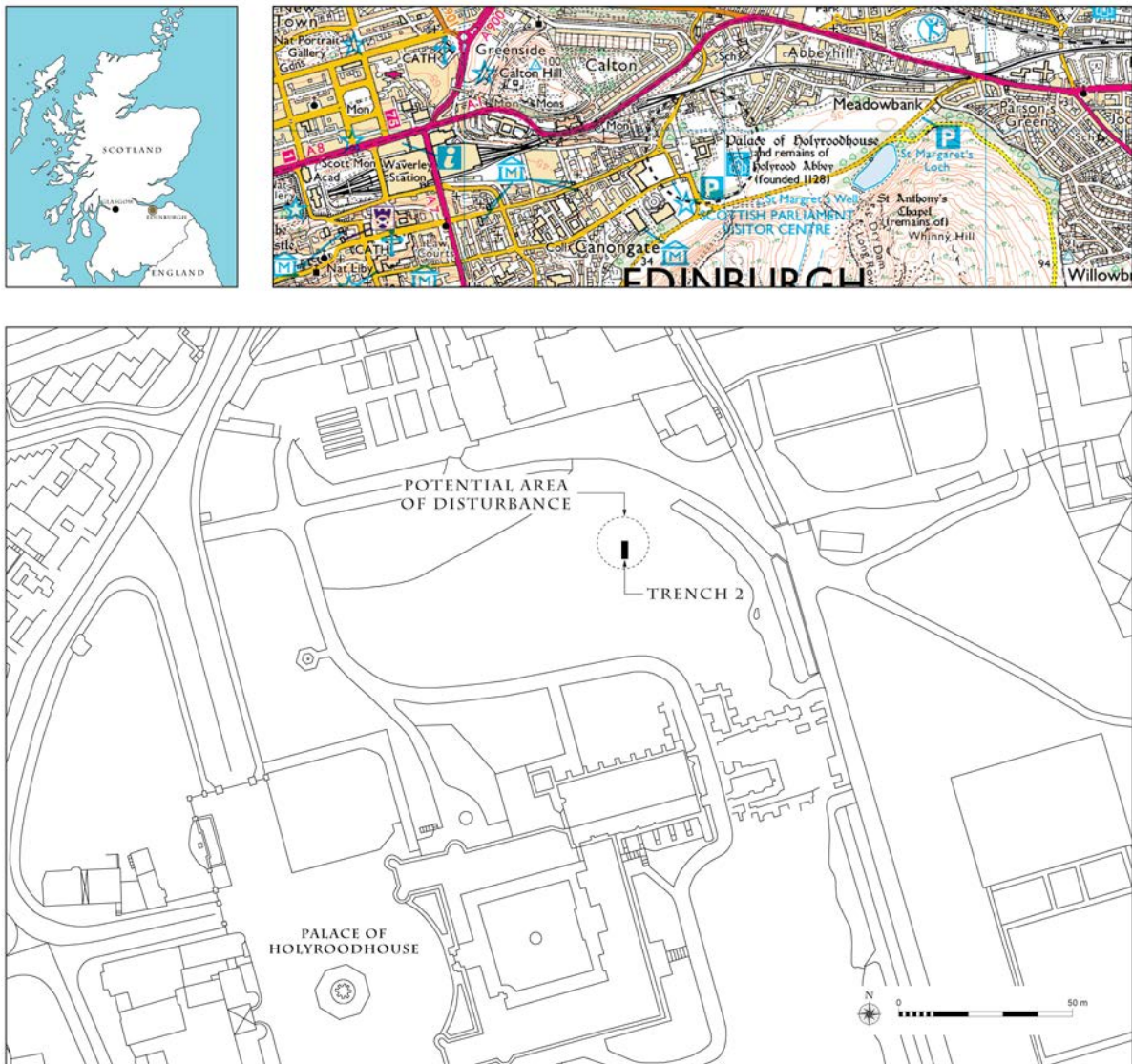


4 Western Terrace, Murrayfield, Edinburgh EH12 5QF

JULY 2012

## INTRODUCTION

Under the terms of its Properties-In-Care (PIC) call-off contract with Historic Scotland, Kirkdale Archaeology was asked to undertake an archaeological excavation of a trench in the N garden of Holyrood Palace (Fig.1). The trench was intended to typify the archaeology in this part of the Palace complex prior to the planting of a tree commemorating the Queen's Diamond Jubilee, and the species intended (Witch Hazel) could mature into a large specimen. The potential damage that the roots of such a tree might cause meant that the intention was to examine a larger area than the initial tree planting hole. A consideration of the significance and form of the archaeology in this area meant that the long term impact of this tree could be assessed.



**Figure 1:** Plan showing the location of Holyrood Palace, and the area of works.  
Inset No. 2 © Crown copyright. All rights reserved 2012. Licence number 100036933.

To achieve this, provision was made for the excavation of two trenches at right angles to each other within the area of potential disturbance; the position of these trenches being determined by Historic Scotland. Both were to measure 5m by 2 m and were to be hand dug to a maximum depth of 1.5m, with their size allowing them to be stepped in to reach this.

Today the area of these trenches is in the NE corner of the Palace gardens, close to the Haw-Haw that forms their boundary to the E. It is well maintained grass, with scattered trees close by and a gravel path running nearby to both N and W. The ground slopes down very gently to the N. The property known as Croft-an-Righ lies to the NE of the gardens, and as both are Historic Scotland properties they are connected today. This access has been achieved by a metal ladder which rises some 2.5m from Croft-an-Righ to reach the level of the gardens.

Gordon of Rothiemay's mid-17<sup>th</sup> century perspective drawing of Edinburgh shows a walled area extending well to the W of the current garden around Croft-an-Righ, into the area of this excavation, with trees and buildings depicted within this wall. Two structures that are no longer extant are shown against the N side of the S wall of this enclosure, and it appears as though they are shown at a lower level than features to the S of his wall. This may indicate that the area has been landscaped, with the ground level potentially raised substantially since the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

The work took place between 16<sup>th</sup> - 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2012.

## **DESCRIPTION**

Work started with Trench 2, which was orientated N/S and positioned so as to be roughly aligned with the E end of the upstanding Abbey buildings, although some 55m to its N. The trench was de-turfed by the Palace garden staff, all other work was undertaken manually by Kirkdale Archaeology. Topsoil **200** proved to be compact dark grey slightly clayey silt 0.15m thick whose removal exposed **204** across much of the trench. This consisted of a mix of mortar, small sandstone fragments and dark grey slightly clayey silt.

A series of features seemed to be dug down into **204**, most obviously a series of five small diameter holes filled with clean sand. These were thought to relate to recent activity, so while they were individually planned, they were given a generic number **203**. At the S end of the trench was a stone free area, interpreted as the fill (**201**) of a cut (**202**). While clear in plan, this feature proved difficult to define in excavation, it measured some 1.25 m N/S by at least 1.7m E/W (it continued out of the trench to the E) and was 0.15m- 0.20m deep.

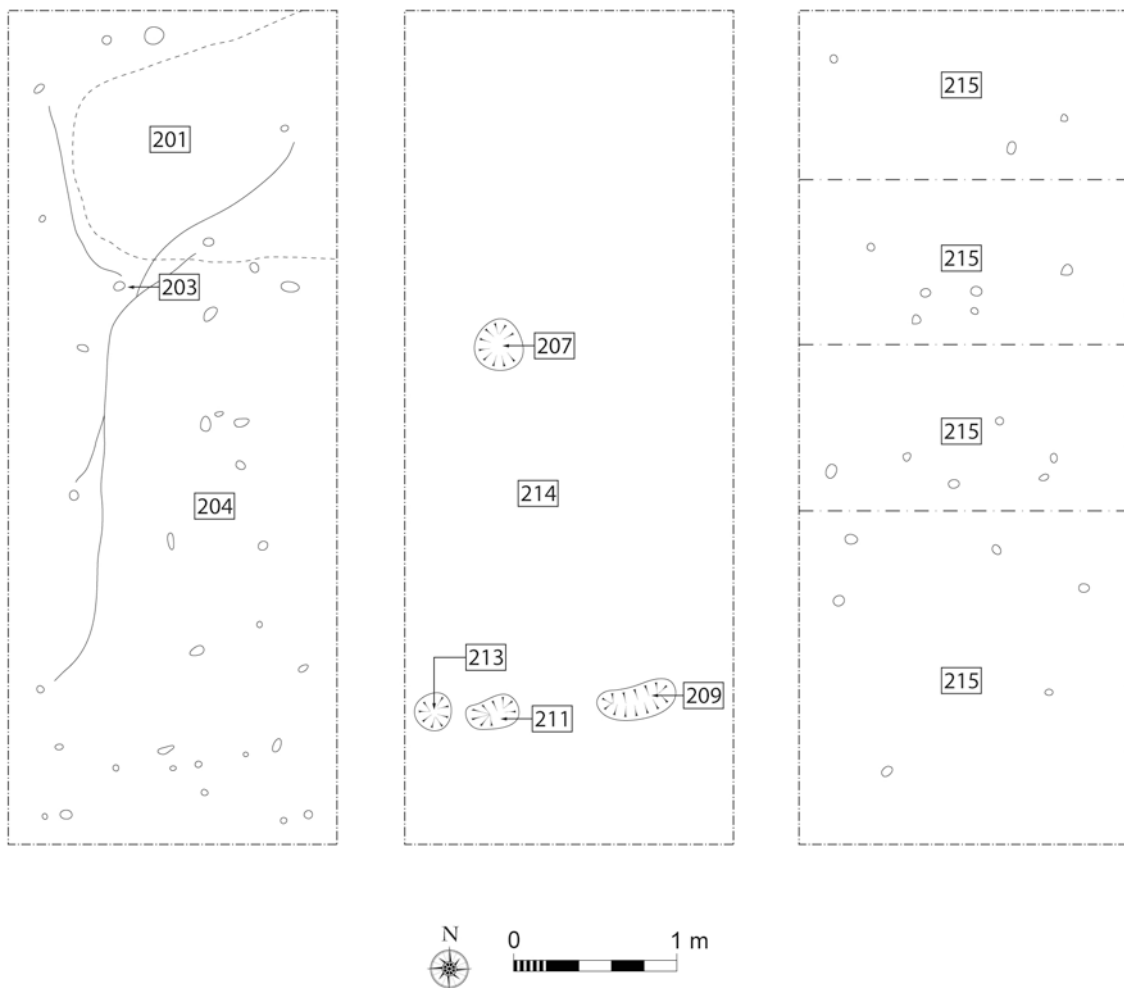


Figure 2: Plans showing contexts 201, 203, 204, 207, 209, 211, 213, 214 and 215

On excavation, **204** proved to be only 0.10m thick, although it merged into **205** below. This comprised a similar soil matrix, with less stone and mortar and more charcoal inclusions and again was 0.10m thick; both **204** and **205** produced a small quantity of 19<sup>th</sup> century china and glass fragments and some bone. The removal of **205** exposed four cut features across the trench; **207** near the N end of the trench, and **209**, **211** and **213** towards the S end. All proved

to be small circular or oval shallow features filled by dark grey slightly clayey silts with some sandstone, mortar and charcoal throughout. While all four were cut through **214**, the layer below **205**, their fills were so similar to **205** that it is possible that they were cut through this as well.

Context **214** was a loose mixed deposit made up of pale yellowish brown sand rich in mortar, dark grey fine silt and sandstone fragments, some with mortar attached. Context **214** contained a small amount of 19<sup>th</sup> century pottery and glass (and some earlier pieces) and much disarticulated bone, some at least clearly human. The whole deposit sloped down from SE to NW and proved to be 0.30m thick.

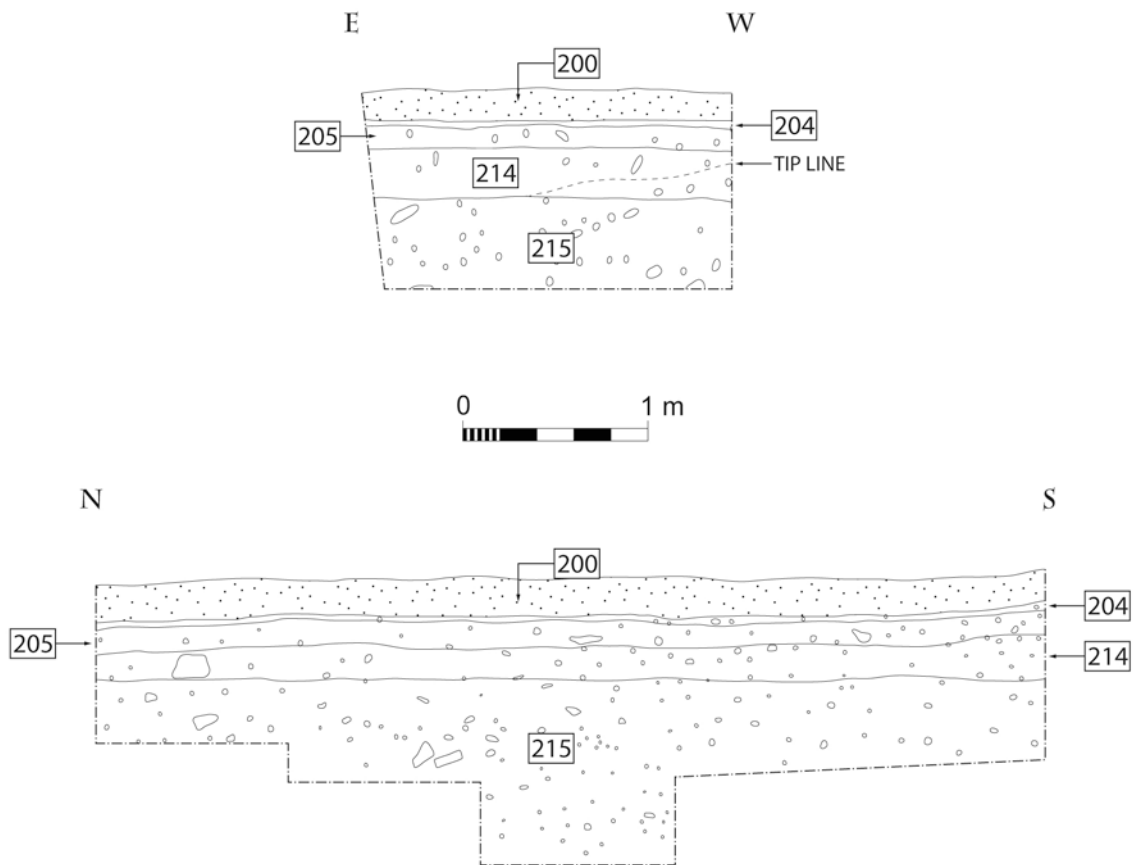


Figure 3: N-facing section (top) and W-facing section

The final excavated deposit **215** had a compacted upper surface (the top 0.10m) onto which **214** naturally peeled off. This was similar to **214**, although with the addition of an element of dark grey slightly clayey silt, forming discrete lenses. Two fragments of hand-made brick

and some slates were noted within **215**, as well as a further small collection of 19<sup>th</sup> century (and earlier) finds and much bone, again including some which was human. A thickness of 0.85m of **215** was excavated, without reaching its base; again this deposit sloped down from SE to NW.

At this stage, in consultation with Historic Scotland, it was decided that one trench had characterised the deposits to a depth of 1.5m, with nothing predating the 19<sup>th</sup> century found, so Trench 1 was not opened.

## **C O N C L U S I O N S**

Three apparently discrete episodes of dumping were revealed in Trench 2 below the modern turf. The latest **204** had a large probable cut **202** dug down into it, probably a planting hole. The sand filled stake holes (all numbered **203**) also post-dating **204** are thought to relate to the very recent erection of tents in this area. Context **204** was a thin deposit, and may possibly be landscaping associated with the construction of the Haw-Haw.

Context **204** sealed **205**, a similar deposit but with far fewer inclusions, again only 0.10m thick. This perhaps represents a relic turf line, buried by the dumping of **204**. Four cuts (**207**, **209**, **211** and **213**) noted after the removal of **205** may actually have been dug down through **205**, and represent further planting holes. Too small an area was opened up to say much about potential distribution patterns, but there was a concentration of three of these features towards the S end of the trench.

Context **204** lay over **214**, a more substantial (0.30m thick) loose deposit, containing 19<sup>th</sup> century finds as well as human bone. This suggests a significant raising of ground levels, perhaps in the earlier 19<sup>th</sup> century, with **205** as a turf over this.

Context **214** naturally peeled off onto the compact upper surface of **215**, a similar deposit. This trampled surface suggests a break between these episodes of dumping, of uncertain duration, although both are likely to be 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Context **214** and **215** together would seem to represent the infilling of the apparent sunken area shown in the 17<sup>th</sup> century W of Croft-an-Righ. This seems to have taken place at a relatively late date, doubtless related to the 19<sup>th</sup> century desire to create appropriate gardens for what was an actively used royal palace. Earlier archaeological deposits (including the buildings depicted by Rothiemay in the 17<sup>th</sup> century) may be very well preserved below a substantial amount of infill. The height difference between Croft-an-Righ and the Palace gardens, and the steep tip lines noted in **214** and **215**, may indicate that there is still some depth to go to these dumps.

Finally, the source of the material used to raise the ground is worth considering. A substantial quantity of bone, some of which was certainly human was noted in **214** and **215**, along with much mortar and some sandstone rubble. Other finds were few, but as well as late medieval pottery this included 19<sup>th</sup> century material. As the Abbey cemetery is known to lie to the N of the Abbey, this seems a remarkable coincidence, surely indicating that this material is derived from nearby. Today the gardens present a fairly flat appearance, with no evidence for activity such as quarrying. It is possible that the ruined E end of the Abbey, excavated in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, was landscaped in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the resulting debris dumped here.



## LIST OF CONTEXTS

No.	Description
200	Topsoil
201	Dark grey very fine silt fill of 202
202	E/W cut at N end of trench (cut into 204)
203	Generic number for sand filled stake holes (five in total)
204	Rubble and silt infill
205	Clean silt below 204
206	Fill of 207
207	Cut at N end of trench
208	Fill of 209
209	Eastern of three cuts at S end of trench
210	Fill of 211
211	Middle of three cuts at S end of trench
212	Fill of 212
213	Western of three cuts at S end of trench
214	Brown silt, mortar and rubble below 205
215	Compact brown silt and mortar below 214

## LIST OF DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHS

No.	Description	From	Date
01	Trench 2 being opened	NW	16/05/2012
02	Trench 2 being opened	N	16/05/2012
03	Trench 2 after removal of topsoil 200	N	16/05/2012
04	Trench 2 after removal of topsoil 200	S	16/05/2012
05	Trench 2, detail of 201 at N end of trench	N	16/05/2012
06	Cut 202 emptied	N	16/05/2012
07	Cut 202 emptied	W	16/05/2012
08	Trench 2 after removal of 205	N	17/05/2012
09	Trench 2 after removal of 205	S	17/05/2012
10	Detail of S end of trench 2: fills 208; 210 and 212	N	17/05/2012
11	Detail of N end of trench: fill 206	N	17/05/2012
12	Detail of N end of trench: fill 206	N	17/05/2012
13	Half-section of cut 207	N	17/05/2012
14	Half-section of cut 209	N	17/05/2012
15	Half-section of cut 211	N	17/05/2012
16	Half-section of cut 213	N	17/05/2012
17	Trench 2 after removal of 214	N	21/05/2012
18	Trench 2 after removal of 214	S	21/05/2012
19	Trench 2 after removal of 214, detail of S end	W	21/05/2012
20	Trench 2 after removal of 214, detail of N end	W	21/05/2012
21	General shot of trench	N	22/05/2012
22	General shot of Abbey	N	22/05/2012
23	General shot of E end of Abbey	NE	22/05/2012
24	General shot of E end of Abbey	NE	22/05/2012
25	General shot of Abbey	NE	22/05/2012
26	N-facing section of Trench 2	N	22/05/2012
27	N-facing section of Trench 2, detail of E end	N	22/05/2012

No.	Description	From	Date
28	N-facing section of trench 2, detail of W end	N	22/05/2012
29	W-facing section of Trench 2, S end	W	22/05/2012
30	W-facing section of Trench 2, N end	W	22/05/2012
31	W-facing section of Trench 2, detail of N end	W	22/05/2012
32	W-facing section of Trench 2, detail to S of last shot	W	22/05/2012
33	W-facing section of Trench 2, detail to S of last shot	W	22/05/2012
34	W-facing section of Trench 2, detail to S of last shot	W	22/05/2012
35	W-facing section of Trench 2, detail to S of last shot	W	22/05/2012
36	Detail of S door of Abbey Church	S	22/05/2012
37	Detail of S door of Abbey Church	S	22/05/2012
38	Detail of S door of Abbey Church	S	22/05/2012
39	Detail of S door of Abbey Church	S	22/05/2012
40	Bone from context 200	N/A	23/05/2012
41	Bone from context 201	N/A	23/05/2012
42	Bone from context 201	N/A	23/05/2012
43	Bone from context 214	N/A	23/05/2012
44	Bone from context 214	N/A	23/05/2012
45	Bone from context 215	N/A	23/05/2012
46	Bone from context 215	N/A	23/05/2012
47	Bone from context 215	N/A	23/05/2012
48	Bone from context 215	N/A	23/05/2012
49	Bone from context 215	N/A	23/05/2012
50	Bone from context 215	N/A	23/05/2012
51	Bone from context 215	N/A	23/05/2012
52	Fountain in Palace forecourt in operation	N	23/05/2012

## LIST OF DRAWINGS

No.	Type	Description	Scale
01	Plan	Plan of contexts 201, 203 and 204	1:20
02	Plan	Plan of contexts 207, 209, 211, 213 and 214	1:20
03	Section	N-facing	1:20
04	Section	W-facing	1:20
05	Plan	Plan of context 215	1:20