

Discovery and Excavation in Scotland

Updated on 15/06/2007

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PROJECT TITLE/SITE NAME:	Ravenscraig Castle
PROJECT CODE:	HSCO-90244-2012-01
PARISH:	Kirkcaldy and Dysart
NAME OF CONTRIBUTOR:	Gordon Ewart
NAME OF ORGANISATION:	Kirkdale Archaeology
TYPE(S) OF PROJECT:	Watching brief
NMRS NO(S):	NT29SE 11
SITE/MONUMENT TYPE(S):	Tower House
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NGR (2 letters, 8 or 10 figures)	NT 2905 9248
START DATE (this season)	13 March 2012
END DATE (this season)	17 July 2012
PREVIOUS WORK (incl. <i>DES</i> ref.)	
MAIN (NARRATIVE) DESCRIPTION: (May include information from other fields)	<p>A ledge running along the top of the cliff adjoining the west side of the west tower is accessed from the ditch to its north by a series of crude rock cut steps, and is further defined by a low wall on its west side and a more substantial one along its southern end. The aim of the work was to investigate the archaeological deposits on this ledge, and assess the possibility of inserting a barrier along the cliff edge.</p> <p>There was little in the way of significant archaeological features, with most of the area covered in only very shallow deposits. But footings were seen that projected up to 0.45m east of the main line of the west wall. Surface traces indicate that these broad footings continue to the north out of the excavated area, while no further part of this feature was visible to the south.</p>
PROPOSED FUTURE WORK:	
CAPTION(S) FOR ILLUSTRS:	
SPONSOR OR FUNDING BODY:	Historic Scotland
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ARCHIVE LOCATION (intended/deposited)	Archive to be deposited in NMRS

HISTORIC SCOTLAND PROPERTIES IN CARE
MINOR ARCHAEOLOGICAL WORKS 2012

Ravenscraig Castle: Excavation, March / July 2012

HS PIC Index Number: 2496

SITE: Ravenscraig Castle, Kircaldy, Fife

N.G.R.: NT 2905 9248

DESCRIPTION: Excavation on the W side of the castle prior to the installation of a
new barrier along the adjacent cliff edge

PROJECT CODE: HSCO-2496-2012-01

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SEPTEMBER 2012

INTRODUCTION

Under the terms of its PIC Call-Off contract with Historic Scotland, Kirkdale Archaeology was asked to carry out an excavation at Ravenscraig Castle in Fife. The castle sits on a promontory, jutting out into the Firth of Forth on the E side of the town of Kirkcaldy (Fig.1). It is surrounded on all sides by cliffs dropping to the sea, except to the N where it is overlooked by higher ground.



Figure 1: Plan showing the location of Ravenscraig Castle, and the area of works.
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The site is represented by two massive drum-shaped towers, to the NW and NE, connected by a range and fronted by a substantial rock cut ditch cutting off the landward side. To the S of this, a series of poorly preserved footings represent all that is left of internal buildings, with indications that it was probably once encircled by a surrounding wall at the top of the cliffs.

A ledge running along the top of the cliff adjoining the W side of the W tower is accessed from the ditch to its N by a series of crude rock cut steps, and is further defined by a low wall on its W side and a more substantial one along its southern end. The aim of the work was to investigate the archaeological deposits on this ledge, and assess the possibility of inserting a barrier along the cliff edge.

Fieldwork was undertaken in two stages, with three trenches opened in March 2012, and the remaining area examined in two further trenches during July 2012 (Fig. 2).

DESCRIPTION

The ledge in question was approximately 1.7 m wide E/ W by 11 m N/ S, with excavation restricted to the southern 6.3m. To the E it is defined by the W tower (**202**), which runs N/ S for its southern 4m, before bulging out gently to the W. Two steps at its base form footings, above which it rises vertically upwards. Traces of a concrete coating on the basal step were evident prior to excavation.

To the S is a substantial wall with a low masonry shelf (**108**) projecting 1.2m N of its line. This has been built against the tower to its E, and the shelf incorporates a *garderobe* chute leading off the cliff to the W. Behind this shelf the wall rises again, with an area of vertical masonry at the base of its E end and ragged protruding masonry running above and to the W of this area. This appears to be the remnants of a small chamber presumably entered from the N, with the *garderobe* chute indicating its function. On the S face of this wall, internal to the castle, is a blocked aperture, of which no trace can now be seen on its N face. This apparent doorway is significantly higher than the ground level of the ledge to its N, with no obvious evidence for how these height differences were reconciled.

On the W side of the ledge is a N/ S wall (**103**) some 10.1m long and 0.25m wide. At its S end this has been reduced to a single course some 0.4m high, rising progressively to stand more than 1m in height at its N end. The base of an apparent gun-loop, and traces of an associated aperture, survives just to the N of the excavated area, and at its extreme N end a single chamfered block indicates a door opening into the ditch. At its S end it is built against shelf **108** above ground, but on its W side footings step out 0.3m, and these seem to be bonded into **108**. Further N the wall widens to the full thickness of 0.55m. Some 4m N of **103**'s S end is a further set of footings occupying a drop in bedrock at a noticeably squint angle to the rest of the wall. Just to the N of the excavated area masonry was just visible against the E face of **103**, stepping out perhaps 0.3m.

To the N is the Castle's ditch, cut through the soft sandstone of the promontory, and just over 1m below the level of the excavated ledge. The masonry of all the walls is a similar yellow sandstone, heavily eroded and doubtless obtained from the local vicinity, if not from the ditch itself.

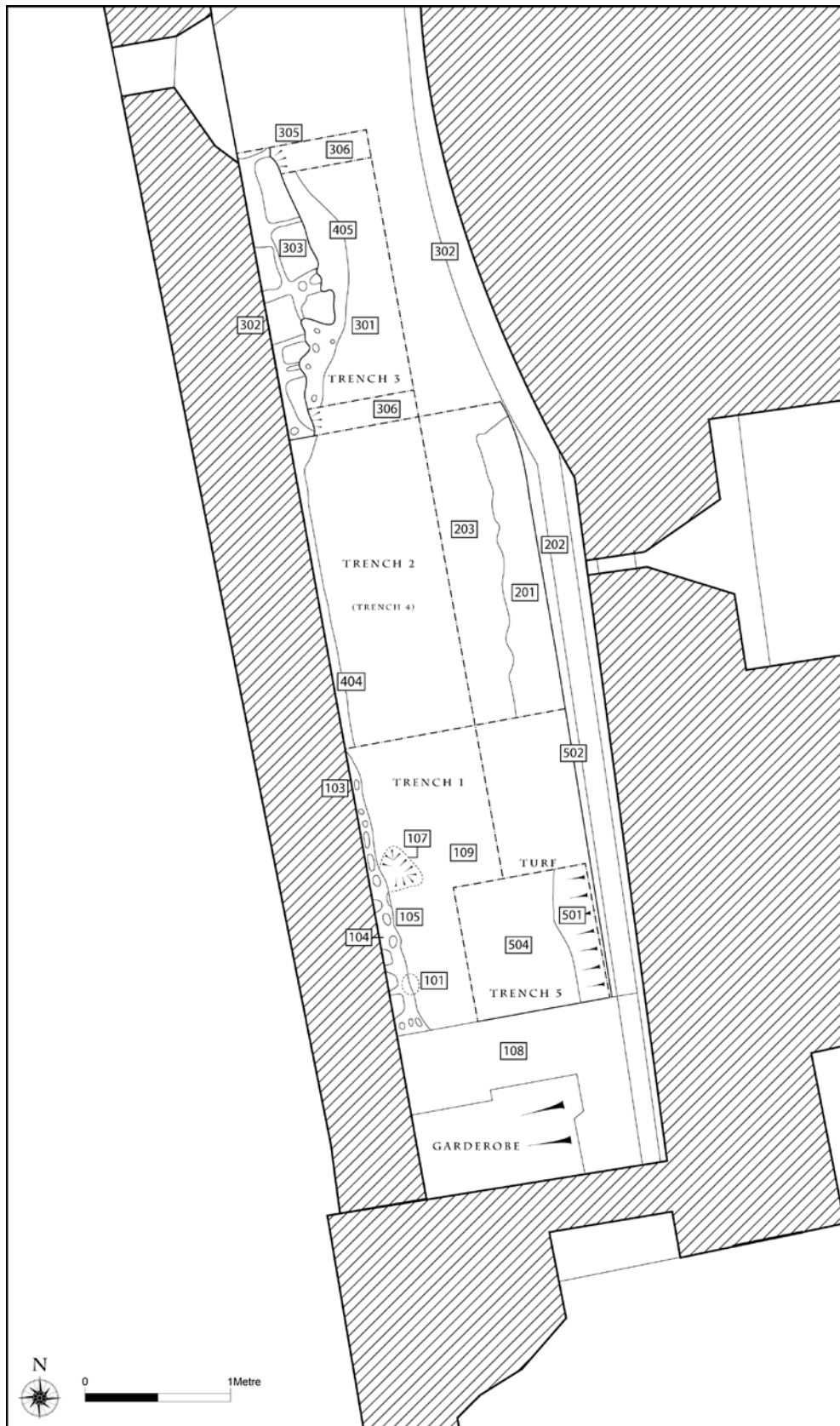


Figure 2: Composite post-excitation plan of trenches 1 – 5

As noted in the introduction the site was excavated in two stages, with an initial three trenches later joined by a further two trenches, which, in combination, saw the total excavation of the S end of the ledge. As a consequence of this manner of excavation many features received multiple context numbers in the field, all of which are listed by trench below¹. For clarity, in this report the site has been treated as a single trench.

The topsoil **100** proved to be dark brown silty sand rich in roots up to 0.1m thick. In the extreme SW corner of the area, near the angle between the W wall **103** and S wall **108** was a small modern pit (cut **102**) with some small change (dated 2008) and a bangle within it. Across the southern 2.5m of the site **100** overlay bedrock **109**, but towards the N a thin (0.07 - 0.08m thick) deposit of similar soil with frequent small yellow sandstone fragments throughout (**301**) was encountered and removed in two narrow *sondages*. This appeared to post-date all the masonry.

To the E, wall **202** was sealed by concrete **201** for its southernmost 4.1m, ending where **202** curved outwards to the W. Context **202** sat directly on the bedrock, with no evidence for a cut. Similarly to the S, wall **108** rested directly on the sandstone bedrock.

To the W, the S end of wall **103** was within a cut **105**, whose unexcavated fill **104** comprised small angular sandstone fragments. For its southern 1.5m this ran at a slight angle to wall **103** within it, beyond which it continued N for a further 2.5m as a narrow (0.05 - 0.08m wide) feature against the wall face. A possible shallow (0.13m deep) cut **107** noted to its E may not be a deliberate feature (perhaps representing an area of prised-out bedrock). Its relationship to **105** was unclear.

Towards the N end of the trench the cut for the W wall widened considerably, bulging out up to 0.65m from wall **103** (here it was numbered **305**). Within this, a set of footings for an earlier wall **303** was recorded. Towards the N end of the excavation, **303** had a good E face, some 1.4m long at an angle to **103**. To the S of this it was ragged and uneven, although probably all part of a single wall. Two small *sondages* through **305** showed it to be at least 0.15m deep, angling to run tight against the E face of **303**, and preventing further excavation.

The bedrock **109** was generally degraded laminating yellow sandstone that formed a fairly level terrace across the site.

¹ Page 7

CONCLUSIONS

The trenches excavated across this terrace showed that a minimal depth of deposits covered the area. To the S, the topsoil **100** lay directly over bedrock **109**, with only a thin deposit **301** between these further to the N. A construction cut **105** / **305** was noted for the W wall **103**, with the others lying directly on the bedrock. A single possible cut feature **107** was so shallow that it seems likely to simply be an area where some bedrock has been prised-out. In spite of this limited information from below the ground, when taken in conjunction with the observable evidence from the upstanding masonry, some useful observations can be made.

The W tower **202** is the earliest structure, built with a series of two low projecting steps as footings. A change in build was noted in this tower significantly above the excavation, with the lower masonry far more eroded than the upper. This can be traced round the W, N and E sides of the tower at a consistent height, coinciding with a disjointed area of masonry where it meets the central range on the E side. This may indicate further structural complexity to this building than previously realized, and it should be noted that the base of the W tower is significantly higher than that of the E, perhaps hinting that the current arrangement was not that originally envisioned.

At the S end of the tower, the low shelf of masonry **108**, and the taller wall to its S both post-date the W tower. Their relationship to each other is not so clear, but if the interpretation given earlier is correct, these form a coherent small *garderobe* chamber, and so are likely to belong together. The S side of this wall reveals further complexity that will be considered below.

The W wall of the site (**103**) was built against the S wall **108** above ground, but the footings on the W side appear to be bonded together. Two possibilities suggest themselves; firstly both walls may be part of a single building campaign, with the footings built simultaneously, and the upper courses built to the S first. The second option is that the lower part of **103** is earlier than the upper section. As the upper part of the S end of **103** is reduced to a single stone in both height and thickness, and is covered by coarse cement, this could represent 20th century reconstruction, although the cement may just be repointing of the original build.

At the N end of the excavation **103** was carried on some substantial footings, **303**, which stepped out up to 0.45m E of the line of **103**, and seemed to be on a different orientation. The cut for this section was given a different number (**305** rather than **105**), but was too tight against the masonry to effectively excavate, so it is unclear if these are separate features. It seems most likely that they are a single feature, as on the W side of this wall the bedrock can be seen to drop at this point, so **303** is

likely to be broad footings built to provide a stable base over this drop. Projecting footings visible on the W side of **103** begin at roughly the same position as **303** on the E side.

The fairly level upper surface of bedrock **109** suggests that this was artificially altered, an easy task given the soft, friable nature of the rock.

We are therefore presented with a long narrow (particularly to the N where tower **202** bulges out) space defined by walls on three sides, with a small *garderobe* chamber to its S. Access was evidently obtained from the N via the castle ditch, and there was at least one gun loop in the W wall. Whether this space was roofed is unclear. If it were, the obvious method would have been a roof built into the W tower sloping down to the W, to rest on the top of W wall **103**. Context **103** does not survive to a sufficient height to show if this was the case, and the stonework of tower **202** is so eroded that any recesses for timberwork would be hard to detect.

Thus, it would appear that we have a small space / room with a *garderobe* at its S end that is entirely inaccessible from the castle itself. The surviving gun loop suggests a defensive function, but any defenders would be trapped within this area in the event of a siege.

The blocked door noted on the S face of the S wall is not visible on the N face, suggesting that originally this was a postern gate, and the gun loop might make more sense in this phase, when withdrawal further into the castle would still have been possible - even if it is unclear how this raised door was accessed. The evidence that at least part of the W wall post-dates the shelf to the S may, as noted above, represent a 20th century rebuild. While this arrangement makes more sense, we are still left with the final phase evidenced today, where a *garderobe* seems to be entirely inaccessible from the castle.

In terms of the practicalities of constructing a barrier, this excavation showed little archaeological impediment except for the footings **303** that project up to 0.45m E of the main line of the W wall. Surface traces indicate that these broad footings continue to the N out of the excavated area. While at the S end these do not exist, they would have to be avoided further to the N. The shallow depth of soil cover indicates that any inserted posts would have to be cut into the bedrock, which is likely to be an artificially created level surface. The soft nature of the rock means that this would be relatively easy to achieve, but that any posts would likely have to be deeply inserted.

LIST OF CONTEXTS

Trench 1

Number	Description
100	Dark brown silty sand topsoil
101	Probable fill of 101
102	Putative cut containing modern coins
103	Upstanding wall forming W limit of trench (same as 302 and 402)
104	Rubble and silty sand fill of 105
105	Cut for 103
106	Fill of 107 , sandy silt with sandstone chunks
107	Shallow possible cut
108	Upstanding wall forming S limit of trench
109	Bedrock, laminating micaceous sandstone

Trench 2

Number	Description
200	Dark brown silty sand topsoil
201	Concrete over 202 (same as 501)
202	Footings to the W tower of the Castle (same as 502)
203	Bedrock, laminating micaceous sandstone

Trench 3

Number	Description
300	Dark brown silty sand topsoil
301	Thin layer of sandy silt and crushed sandstone under 300
302	Upstanding wall forming W side of trench (same as 103 and 402)
303	Wall below 302
304	Cut at S end of trench for 303
305	Cut at N end of trench for 303
306	Bedrock, laminating micaceous sandstone

Trench 4

Number	Description
400	Dark brown silty sand topsoil
401	Sandy silt and crushed sandstone under 400 (same as 301)
402	Upstanding wall forming W side of trench (same as 103 and 302)
403	Wall below 402
404	Cut at S end of trench for 403
405	Cut at N end of trench for 403
406	Bedrock, laminating micaceous sandstone

Trench 5

Number	Description
500	Dark brown silty sand topsoil
501	Concrete over 502 (same as 201)
502	Upstanding wall forming E side of trench (same as 202)

503	Bedrock, laminating micaceous sandstone
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LIST OF DRAWINGS

Number	Type	Description	Scale
1	Plan	Trenches 1, 2 and 3 as finished	1: 20
2	Plan	Trenches 4 and 5 as finished	1: 20

LIST OF DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHS

Number	Description	From	Date
1	Site, pre-excavation	N	13/ 03/ 2012
2	Site, pre-excavation	NW	13/ 03/ 2012
3	Send of site before excavation	NE	13/ 03/ 2012
4	Middle of site before excavation	N	13/ 03/ 2012
5	N end of site before excavation	NE	13/ 03/ 2012
6	Work in progress	N	13/ 03/ 2012
7	Work in progress	N	13/ 03/ 2012
8	Trench 1, 101 over fill 104	E	13/ 03/ 2012
9	Trench 1, 101 over fill 104	E	13/ 03/ 2012
10	Trench 1 as finished	E	13/ 03/ 2012
11	Trench 1 as finished	S	13/ 03/ 2012
12	Trench 1 as finished	N	13/ 02/ 2012
13	Trench 1 as finished, detail of N end	E	13/ 02/ 2012
14	Trench 1, fill 106	E	13/ 03/ 2012
15	Trench 2 as finished	W	13/ 03/ 2012
16	Trench 2 as finished, detail of N end	W	13/ 03/ 2012
17	Trench 2 as finished, detail of Send	W	13/ 03/ 2012
18	Trench 2 as finished, detail of footings 202	W	13/ 03/ 2012
19	Trench 1, cut 107 emptied	E	13/ 03/ 2012
20	Trench 1, detail of junction of walls 103 and 108	NE	13/ 03/ 2012
21	Base of wall 108 at Send of site	N	13/ 03/ 2012
22	Base of wall 108 at Send of site	N	13/ 03/ 2012
23	Base of wall 108 in excavated area	N	13/ 03/ 2012
24	Trench 3 showing wall 303	S	14/ 03/ 2012
25	Trench 3 showing wall 303	S	14/ 03/ 2012
26	Trench 3 showing wall 303 and 'squint' footings on W side of wall 103 / 302	S	14/ 03/ 2012
27	'Squint' footings on W side of wall 103 / 302	SW	14/ 03/ 2012
28	Trench 3 showing wall 303	W	14/ 03/ 2012
29	Trench 3 showing wall 303	N	14/ 03/ 2012
30	Trench 3 showing wall 303	N	14/ 03/ 2012
31	'Squint' footings on W side of wall 103 / 302	E	14/ 03/ 2012
32	Trench 3 showing wall 303	N	14/ 03/ 2012
33	Trench 3 showing wall 303	E	14/ 03/ 2012
34	Trench 3, <i>Sondage</i> 1 at Send of Trench 3 as finished	N	14/ 03/ 2012
35	Trench 3, <i>Sondage</i> 1 at Send of Trench 3 as finished	N	14/ 03/ 2012
36	Trench 3, W end of Ssection of <i>Sondage</i> 1	N	14/ 03/ 2012
37	Trench 3, E end of Ssection of <i>Sondage</i> 1	N	14/ 03/ 2012
38	Trench 3, W end of <i>Sondage</i> 1	E	14/ 03/ 2012
39	<i>Sondage</i> 2 at N end of Trench 3	S	14/ 03/ 2012
40	Trench 3, N section of <i>Sondage</i> 2	S	14/ 03/ 2012
41	Trench 3, W end of N section of <i>Sondage</i> 2	S	14/ 03/ 2012

Number	Description	From	Date
42	Trench 3, W end of N section of <i>Sondage 2</i>	E	14/ 03/ 2012
43	General shot of W side of Castle	W	14/ 03/ 2012
44	General shot of W side of W tower	W	14/ 03/ 2012
45	Wall 108 at S end of site	N	14/ 03/ 2012
46	Wall 108 , detail of base	N	14/ 03/ 2012
47	Wall 108 , detail of base	N	14/ 03/ 2012
48	Wall 108 , detail of upper section	N	14/ 03/ 2012
49	Gun loop in wall 103 / 302	E	14/ 03/ 2012
50	Gun loop in wall 103 / 302	E	14/ 03/ 2012
51	Gun loop in wall 103 / 302	S	14/ 03/ 2012
52	Door jamb at N end of wall 103 / 302	E	14/ 03/ 2012
53	Door jamb at N end of wall 103 / 302	E	14/ 03/ 2012
54	Door jamb at N end of wall 103 / 302	NE	14/ 03/ 2012
55	Sface of wall 108	SE	14/ 03/ 2012
56	Sface of wall 108	SE	14/ 03/ 2012
57	Detail of blocked door in Sface of 108	S	14/ 03/ 2012
58	<i>Garderobe</i> chute in front of blocked door in Sface of 108	S	14/ 03/ 2012
59	General pre-excavation shot	N	17/ 07/ 2012
60	General pre-excavation shot	N	17/ 07/ 2012
61	General pre-excavation shot	S	17/ 07/ 2012
62	General pre-excavation shot	S	17/ 07/ 2012
63	Trench 4 as finished	S	17/ 07/ 2012
64	Trench 4 as finished	N	17/ 07/ 2012
65	Trench 4, W facing section	NW	17/ 07/ 2012
66	Trench 4, footings 403	N	17/ 07/ 2012
67	Trench 4, cut 404 at S end	N	17/ 07/ 2012
68	Trench 4 as finished	N	17/ 07/ 2012
69	Trench 5 as finished	N	17/ 07/ 2012
70	Trench 5 as finished	N	17/ 07/ 2012
71	Trench 5 as finished	S	17/ 07/ 2012
72	Trench 5, detail of concrete 501	W	17/ 07/ 2012