

# **Blairquhan Castle: Archaeological Watching Brief**

Data Structure Report



by Liam McKinstry

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on behalf of CASA Design Architects

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## Introduction

1. This Data Structure Report has been prepared for CASA Design Architects in support of construction work on land at Blairquhan Castle, South Ayrshire (13/01499/PP). The proposed development work includes the reduction of the existing gravel surface and the putting down of a new resin surface in the castle forecourt. These archaeological works are designed to mitigate any adverse impact on the archaeological remains within the development area. This report covers the excavation of the drainage network which was to underlie the new resin surface of the castle forecourt. These works were carried out between the 12<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> of May 2014.
2. South Ayrshire Council required a programme of archaeological works to be undertaken in support of any planning consent which may be granted by the planning authority. The West of Scotland Archaeology Service who advise South Ayrshire Council on archaeological matters provided guidance on the structure of archaeological mitigation required on this site prior to and during development works.
3. The method statement (Matthews 2014) provided the detail of the works (archaeological monitoring, exclusion, excavation, post-excavation analyses and publication) for the mitigation pertaining to ground breaking within the development area and hence the direct physical impact on buried sediments.

## Historical and Archaeological Background

4. Blairquhan Castle lies to the immediate NW of Straiton; a Category A Listed Building within an Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes site. Blairquhan Castle is a Regency era castle. It was the historic home of the Hunter-Blair baronets and remained in the family's possession until 2012, when it was sold to a Chinese company.
5. The designed landscape was laid out originally in the 17<sup>th</sup> century then remodelled in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the woods and parkland landscape being a major feature. The designed landscape provides a setting for the Category A castle and three other listed buildings, described below. The house was constructed on a terrace over the site of an earlier castle in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century with open views to the north across the Water of Girvan that meanders through the designed landscape.
6. The three additional Category B listed buildings located within the designed landscapes are ancillary structures to Blairquhan Castle; these core buildings run as an E- to W- aligned row at the base of a north-facing slope. The main facade faces south, although the location also allows sound views of the house and park from the northwest.
7. Blairquhan linked to structures within the wider designed landscape through the deliberate manipulation of views and vistas. The north drive provides a particularly strong example of this; it runs southwards up the Water of Girvan within sheltering woodland, before turning east to emerge into open ground, revealing the house. Along this drive one major view towards the house is provided from the northwest, with a memorial obelisk standing on nearby Highgate Hill visible to the rear. This commemorates Lt. Colonel Hunter Blair who was mortally wounded at the Battle of Inkerman in 1854.

### *Prehistoric Activity*

8. The nearest known prehistoric activity to Blairquhan Castle has been recorded at Cawin and Bennan Hills which are both located at around 1.5-2km from the castle and its grounds. At Cawin Hill there were two burnt mound sites (Canmore ID 216481/216473 and WoSAS PIN 43135/43137) and at Bennan Hill two cinerary urns were recovered during the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Canmore ID 41559 and WoSAS PIN 6134).

### *Medieval or Later Rural Settlement*

9. As well as the known demolished castle within the Blairquhan grounds there are also references to an unexcavated enclosure with associated 'shielings' and ridge and furrow still visible (Canmore ID 219177). This enclosure site was located 1.5-2km to the south of

the Blairquhan grounds on Cawin Hill and may represent medieval or post medieval activity.

10. The earliest reference to Blairquhan Castle in the cartographic record is within Adair's map of 1685 where the castle is clearly shown to the southeast of Maybole. It is also shown in Molls map of the shire of Bute (1745) though spelt incorrectly as 'Blawhane'. The 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> edition Ordnance maps both show Blairquhan Castle in what is the currently the existing layout of buildings and roads within the estate grounds.

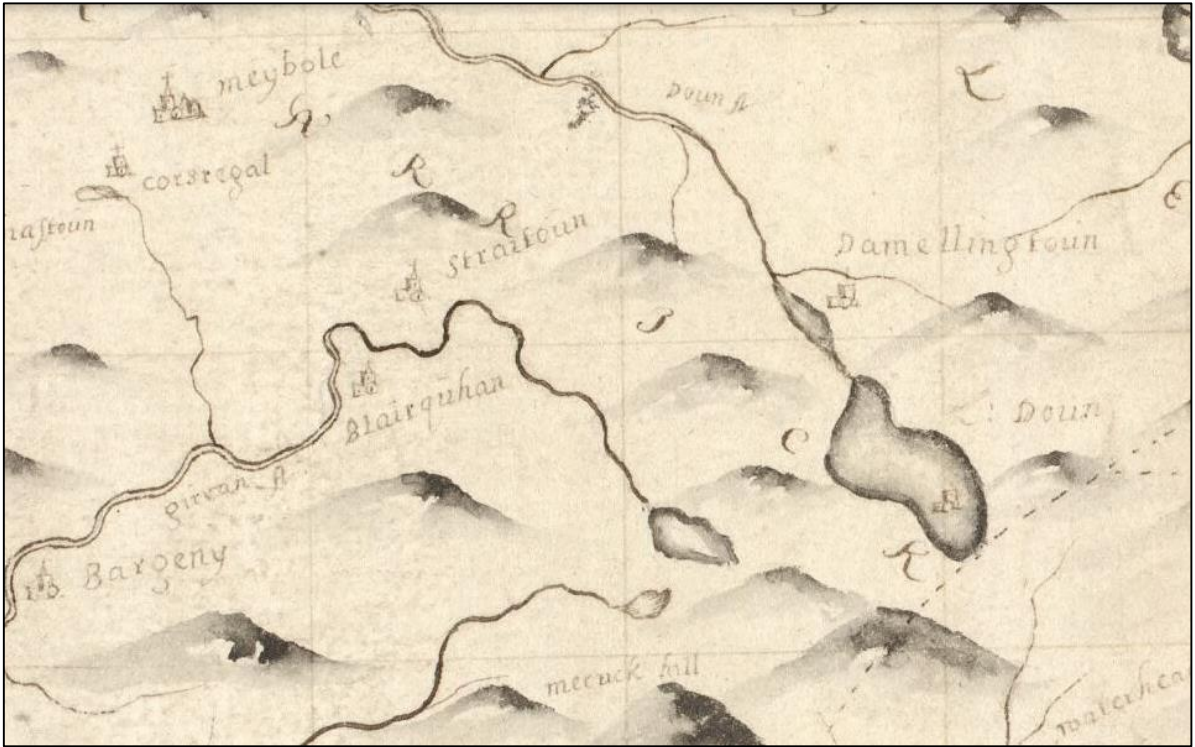


Figure 1: Extract from Adair's map of 1685



Figure 2: Extract from Moll's the shire of Bute (1745)

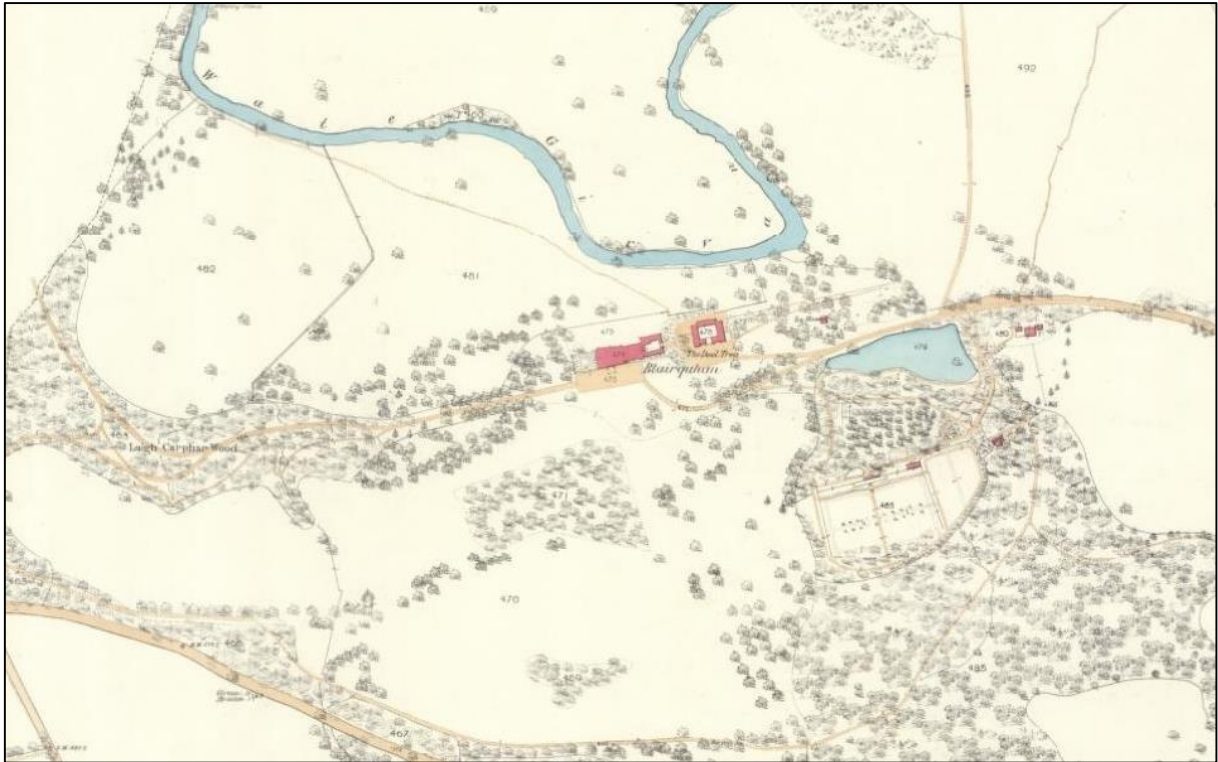


Figure 3: Extract from 1st Edition Ordnance Survey Map (1868)

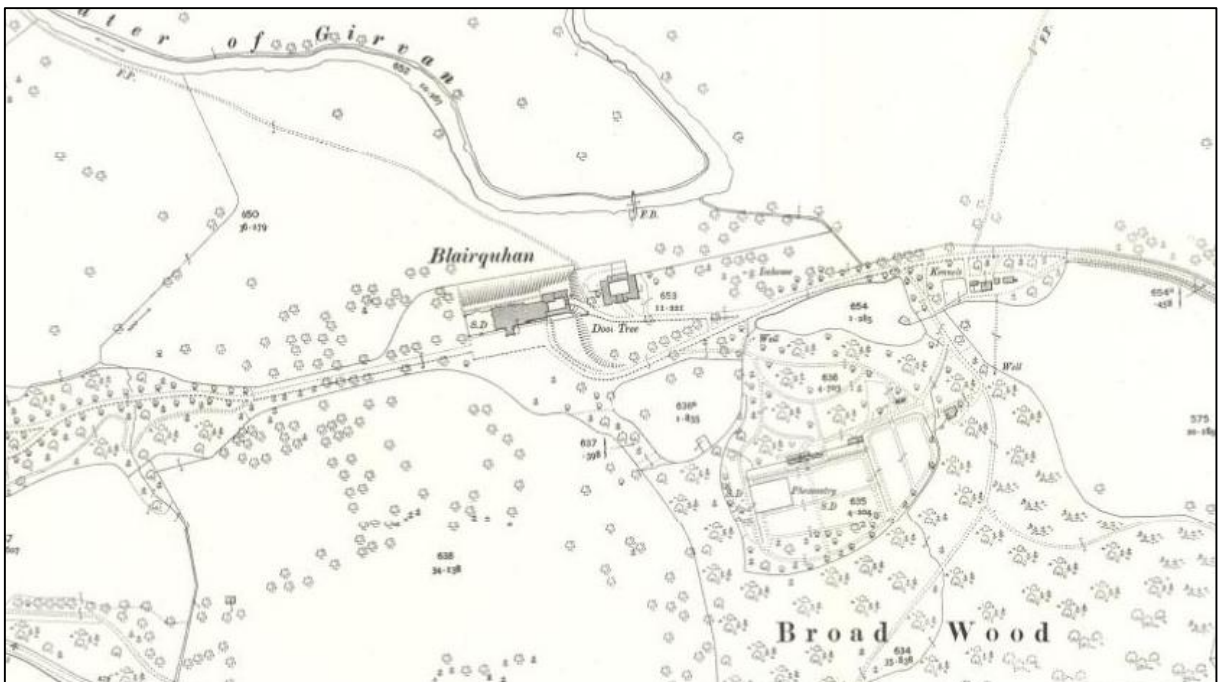


Figure 4: Extract from 2nd Edition Ordnance Survey Map (1924)

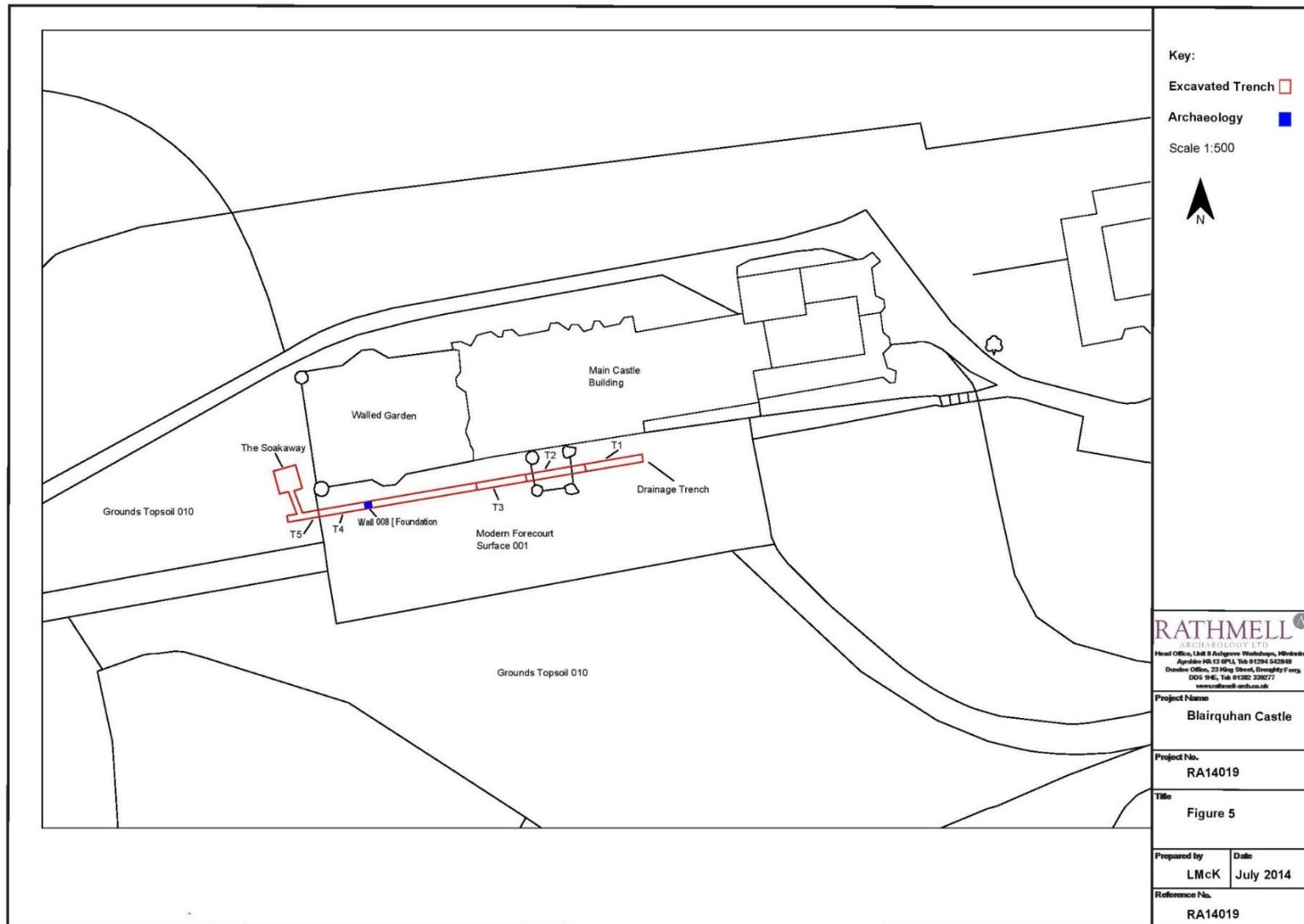


Figure 5: Site Location Plan.



## Project Works

11. This stage of the programme of works comprised the archaeological monitoring of a stretch of drainage trenching, divided from east to west into areas T1 through to T5, with an associated soak away pit. The majority of this trench ran parallel to the front of the main castle building and a formal walled garden: it then turned sharply to the north where the soak away pit was located (Figure 4). Only the last 7m and the soak away pit were excavated away from the area covered by the gravel forecourt within the main grounds, which consisted of an area of open lawn, where the topsoil (010) consisted of a moderately compacted mid grey-brown sandy-silt with a depth range of 0.14-0.23m. The upper layer of the forecourt area was made of gravel (001) which overlay a foundation of very compacted rubble or hard-core (002). Both of these upper layers, the combined maximum depth of which was 0.27m, were relatively modern in date. The works were carried out in compliance with the terms agreed in the method statement (Matthews 2014).
12. Any potential archaeological features were investigated and recorded, with the on-site works taking place between the 12<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> of May 2014. All works were conducted in accordance with the Institute for Archaeologists' Standards and Policy Statements and Code of Conduct and Historic Scotland Policy Statements.

## Findings

13. Areas T1-T3 consisted of a 24m length of the drainage trench with a depth range of 0.64m-0.68m and contained four main fills. The upper two fills, (001) and (002), formed the modern forecourt surface. Abutting the forecourt surface was a layer of cobbles set within mortar (005) which formed part of a junction between the main entranceway into the castle's main building and the forecourt. Underlying the modern surface was a naturally occurring subsoil (003) which consisted of moderately compacted mid orange-brown silty-sand with moderate rounded/sub-rounded stone and occasional gravel inclusions. Underlying this was another naturally occurring subsoil layer (004) which consisted of loosely compacted mid grey-brown sand with occasional small to medium sized stone and gravel inclusions. No archaeology was identified within these areas.
14. Area T4 consisted of a 24m continuation of the drainage trench to the immediate west of the castle's main entrance and had a depth range of 0.94m-1.04m. Area T4 contained the same fills as T1-3, though being deeper, a further natural deposit, (006), was identified underlying subsoil layer (004). This deposit consisted of a moderately compacted mixed mid grey/dark orange brown silt with moderate stone inclusions. A linear stone foundation, [008], (009) and [011], was identified within area T4 approximately 16m west of the south western corner of the main castle building (between NS 36498 05449 and NS 36493 05448) which was orientated in an north-south direction. The foundation underlay a modern rubble layer (007) which seemed to be contemporary with the forecourt's foundation layer (002). The structure lay within a linear cut [011]: the latter measured 0.5m in length, 1.58m wide and 0.4m deep, extending further beyond the baulks to both the north and south. Break of slope at top was moderate, and the sides almost vertical. The break of slope at the base was moderate and the base was flat. The structure itself measured 1.22m wide and 0.4m thick and rested on a lining of blue grey clay (009) which had a thickness range of 0.06-0.2m. It consisted of 1-2 courses which were visible in section and partially in plan. The stones were sub-rounded/sub-irregular shaped and measured 0.56m x 0.43m x 0.43m. They were laid out with the flatter edges of the stones forming an almost straight edge on the eastern side. This also seemed to be the case on the western side though it was only partially visible due to modern disturbance. The bonding material consisted of a mix of lumps of clay similar to the lining (009) and a dark grey sandy material.
15. Area T5 was situated off the forecourt in the main grounds where the drainage ditch first continued on for 2.7m in a westerly direction then turned sharply to the north for 3.6m. The depth range within area T5 was 0.95m-0.98m. The soak away pit was attached to the

western end of T5 and measured 2m by 2m and was excavated to a depth of 2m. The topsoil (010) within the grounds consisted of moderately compacted mid grey-brown sandy-silt with occasional small stones and root inclusions. The topsoil had a depth range of 0.14-0.23m. The three naturally occurring subsoil layers identified in the other areas within the drainage ditch, (003), (004) and (006), continued within T5 and the soak away pit. A further layer of naturally-occurring subsoil (012) was identified underlying (006). This layer consisted of moderately compacted mixed light-mid grey/light-mid orange brown clayey-silt/silty-sand with occasional to moderate small stone inclusions. No archaeology was identified within this area.

## Discussion

16. The monitoring works within the forecourt of Blairquhan Castle revealed a stone foundation - represented by [008], (009) and [011]- from what may originally have been a sizable stone wall. This wall may relate to the remains of the earlier medieval castle, said to be located under the lawn which sits to the immediate south of the forecourt. The original castle, a Kennedy stronghold, was said to date to 1346 with a later extension built in 1573. This extension may have been constructed in response to an act passed by the Scottish parliament in 1535 which decreed that "each landowner of £100 rental should build in a convenient place for himself and his tenants a barmkin, 60ft square with walls 3ft thick and 18ft high, with tower if necessary, into which his tenants could bring their goods and livestock in troubled times" (Stell 1992). A wall with approximately these dimensions still stands at Buckholm castle in Selkirkshire and it too was constructed during the mid to late 16<sup>th</sup> century (MacGibbon and Ross 1887-92). This may suggest that the wall uncovered within the drainage trench could be the base of a barmkin wall around the original castle or tower building similar to that found at Buckholm and other castles in the south of Scotland rather than the wall of say a large building. The stone foundations [008] width of 1.22m would be only slightly wider than the 3ft thickness stated in the 1535 act of parliament. That and the clay lining and bonding used in the construction would suggest that the foundation was at least 16<sup>th</sup> century in date though an earlier date cannot be ruled out.



Figure 6: View of main castle building. From the west southwest.



Figure 7: View of drainage trench in progress in area T4. From the east.



Figure 8: South facing section at T4's western end.



Figure 9: Post excavation view of soak away pit. From the east southeast.



Figure 10: View of stone foundation [008] in area T4. From the east.



Figure 11: South facing section at western end of T4 showing stone foundation [008].

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## Recommendations

17. This Data Structure Report covers the archaeological works for the construction work for the new forecourt at Blairquhan Castle, South Ayrshire (13/01499/PP). The recommendations put forward in this document will be contributory to any final recommendations made on the completion of the works.
18. The archaeological monitoring works uncovered the foundation of a probable medieval or late medieval wall, perhaps associated with the original medieval castle at Blairquhan, or alternatively, an enclosure or barmkin wall added in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century. The upper layers of the existing forecourt, 0.2m-0.3m thick, were all 19<sup>th</sup> or 20<sup>th</sup> century in date but beneath this the earlier foundations survived to a height of two courses (0.4m deep). It is highly probable that further remains associated with the medieval and late medieval occupation of Blairquhan survive under the forecourt and in the grounds to the immediate south. It is therefore recommended that any future works in the forecourt or grounds which exceed 0.3m in depth should be monitored.
19. The appropriateness and acceptability of our recommendations rest with the North Ayrshire Council and their advisors, the West of Scotland Archaeology Service.

## Conclusion

20. Archaeological monitoring work was carried out at Blairquhan Castle in respect to the reduction of the existing gravel surface and the putting down of a new resin surface in the castle forecourt (13/01499/PP). The archaeological monitoring mainly dealt with the excavation of a drainage network in front of the main castle building which was to underlie the new resin surface. These works were carried out between the 12th and 14th of May 2014.
21. The drainage ditch was divided into four areas from east to west (T1-4) and one area (T5) from south to north which fed into a large soak away pit. The existing forecourt comprised the two uppermost layers which extended throughout much of the drainage ditch to a depth of 0.2-0.3m. Part of a linear stone wall, [008], (009) and [011], was identified within area T4, approximately 16m west from the south western corner of the main castle building (between NS 36498 05449 and NS 36493 05448) and orientated in an north-south direction. The wall survived to a height of 1-2 courses which were visible in section and partially visible in plan. The stones were unworked sub-rounded/sub-irregular shaped and measured 0.56m x 0.43m x 0.43m. They were laid with their flatter edges forming an almost straight edge on the eastern side. This also seemed to be the case on the western side though it was only partially visible due to modern disturbance. The bonding material consisted of a mix of lumps of clay and a dark grey sandy material. The stone wall measured 1.22m wide and 0.4m thick and was identified over a length of 0.5m, though it seems to have extended further to both the north and south beyond the limits of the trench. It lay within a cut which followed the same linear plan. Like the wall itself, the cut measured 0.5m long in length, and may have extended further to both the north and south. Its width was slightly greater than the wall, measuring 1.58m wide and 0.4m deep. The break of slope at the top of the cut was moderate, the sides almost vertical. The break of slope at its base was moderate and the base itself flat. Lining the cut was a thick layer of blue grey clay which had a thickness ranging between 0.06-0.2m.
22. With its clay-bonded walls, this foundation may represent a surviving foundation from the original castle, a Kennedy stronghold said to date to 1346, the remains of which are said to be located beneath the lawn which sits to the immediate south of the forecourt. Alternatively, it may be part of a later barmkin wall added to the medieval castle in 1573. Walls in other medieval castle sites in the south of Scotland, such as at Buckholm in Selkirkshire, have been shown to have similar dimensions and composition as the foundation remains at Blairquhan so it seems more likely that the remains were from the later barmkin.

## Acknowledgements

23. The author would like to thank CASA Design Architects for their support throughout the project and Louise Turner for her kind input and editing.
24. This project has been monitored for WoSAS by Paul Robins who has given guidance and direction.

## References

### *Documentary*

- MacGibbon, D & Ross, T 1887-92 *The Castellated and Domestic Architecture of Scotland Volume III. Mercat Press Edinburgh 1999.*
- Stell, G 1992 *Early farm buildings in Scotland in RLHG Journal Volume 4*

### *Internet*

- [www.scottishvoice.org](http://www.scottishvoice.org)
- [www.scottish-places.info](http://www.scottish-places.info)
- [www.canmore.rcahms.gov.uk](http://www.canmore.rcahms.gov.uk)

### *Cartographic*

- 1685 Adair Adair County Maps
- 1745 Moll, H The Shire of Air
- 1867 Ordnance Survey 1<sup>st</sup> edition Map of Ayrshire 1: 2500
- 1896 Ordnance Survey 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition Map of Ayrshire 1:2500

## Appendix 1: Registers

Within this appendix are all registers pertaining to works on-site during the watching brief:-

### Context Register

Context No.	Area/ Trench	Type	Description	Interpretation
001	-	Deposit	Loose to moderately compacted dark grey gravel and bitumen. Depth range of 0.06-0.08m.	Modern forecourt surface
002	-	Deposit	Very compacted mid grey-brown, concrete-like sand with frequent small stone and gravel and occasional brick fragment inclusions. Depth range of 0.14-0.19m.	Lower forecourt foundation surface
003	-	Deposit	Moderately compacted mid orange-brown silty-sand with moderate rounded/sub-rounded stone and occasional gravel inclusions.	Natural subsoil
004	-	Deposit	Loosely compacted mid grey-brown sand with occasional small to medium sized stone and gravel inclusions.	Natural subsoil
005	-	Deposit	Very compacted mid-light grey cobble and mid to dark grey mortar. Cobble size 0.06mx 0.08m x 0.04m. Overall thickness of the layer was 0.08m.	Modern cobbled entrance for the main castle building.
006	-	Deposit	Moderately compacted mixed mid grey and dark orange brown silt with moderate stone inclusions. Overall depth of 0.11m.	Natural subsoil
007	-	Deposit	Moderately compacted mid grey silty sand with frequent (80%) small to medium sized sub-angular stone inclusions. Overall depth of 0.24m.	Modern rubble/soil infill layer. Possibly same as or contemporary with layer (002).
008	-	Structure	Stone structure which was linear shaped in plan with 1-2 courses visible in section. The stones were sub-rounded/sub-irregular shaped and measured 0.56m x 0.43m x 0.43m. It was orientated in an east-west direction. The stones were laid out with the straighter edges of the stones forming an almost straight edge on	Possible medieval stone foundations.



Context No.	Area/ Trench	Type	Description	Interpretation
			the southern side. This also seemed to be the case on the northern side though it was only partially visible due to modern disturbance. The bonding material consisted of a mix of lumps of clay similar to the lining (009) and a dark grey sandy material. The structure was 0.5m long, though may have extended further to both the east and west, 1.22m wide and 0.4m thick.	
009	-	Deposit	Very compacted blue-grey clay with no inclusions. Depth range of 0.06m-0.2m.	Clay bonding/lining associated with stone foundations [008].
010	-	Deposit	Moderately compacted mid grey-brown sandy-silt with occasional small stones and root inclusions. Depth range of 0.14-0.23m.	Topsoil within grounds.
011	-	Cut	Linear shaped in plan. Measured 0.5m long, though may have extended further to both the east and west, 1.58m wide and 0.4m thick. Break of slope at top was moderate. Sides were almost vertical. The break of slope at the base was moderate and the base was flat. The cut was orientated in an east-west direction. The cut was filled by (009) and [008].	Cut for stone foundation [008] and clay lining (009).
012	-	Deposit	Moderately compacted mixed light-mid grey/light-mid orange brown clayey-silt/silty-sand with occasional to moderate small stone inclusions.	Underlies (006) within the soak away pit

### Photographic Register

Image No.	Digital	Description	From	Date
01	1	General view at the front of the castle.	SE	12/05/14

Image No.	Digital	Description	From	Date
02	2	View of excavated area T1 of the drainage ditch.	SE	12/05/14
03	3	View of excavated area T2 of the drainage ditch.	SE	12/05/14
04	4	View of excavated area T3 of the drainage ditch.	S	12/05/14
05	5	Pre excavation view of drainage ditch.	W	12/05/14
06	6	Pre excavation view of drainage ditch.	E	12/05/14
07	7	Pre excavation view of soak away pit area.	S	12/05/14
08	8	Pre excavation view of final stretch of drainage ditch.	W	12/05/14
09	9	View of main castle building.	WSW	12/05/14
10	10	View of drainage trench in progress.	ESE	12/05/14
11	11	North facing section of drainage trench, T4.	N	12/05/14
12	12	View of drainage trench in progress, T4.	E	12/05/14
13	13	View of drainage trench in progress, T4.	E	12/05/14
14	14	View of castle from ESE.	ESE	13/05/14
15	15	View of (007) from east.	E	13/05/14
16	16	View of T4 at western end, showing foundation [008].	E	13/05/14
17	17	View of stone foundation [008] in area T4.	E	13/05/14
18	18	South facing section at T4's western end, showing foundation [008].	S	13/05/14
19	19	View of T4 and the start of T5 ongoing.	E	13/05/14
20	20	View of soak away pit under excavation.	E	13/05/14
21	21	E facing section of T5.	N	13/05/14
22	22	View of soak away pit.	ENE	14/05/14

Image No.	Digital	Description	From	Date
23	23	Post excavation view of T5.	NE	14/05/14
24	24	Post excavation view of the soak away pit.	ENE	14/05/14

*Drawing Register*

Drawing No.	Sheet No.	Type	Scale	Description	Date
01	1	Plan	1:20	Plan of possible medieval stone foundations [008].	13/05/14
02	2	Section	1:20	West facing section of possible medieval stone foundations [008].	13/05/14

## Appendix 2: Discovery & Excavation in Scotland

<b>LOCAL AUTHORITY:</b>	South Ayrshire
<b>PROJECT TITLE/SITE NAME:</b>	Blairquhan Castle
<b>PROJECT CODE:</b>	RA14019
<b>PARISH:</b>	Straiton
<b>NAME OF CONTRIBUTOR:</b>	Liam McKinstry
<b>NAME OF ORGANISATION:</b>	Rathmell Archaeology Limited
<b>TYPE(S) OF PROJECT:</b>	Watching brief
<b>NMRS NO(S):</b>	NS30NE 2.00 (Canmore ID 41501)
<b>SITE/MONUMENT TYPE(S):</b>	None
<b>SIGNIFICANT FINDS:</b>	None
<b>NGR (2 letters, 8 or 10 figures)</b>	NS 36531 05468
<b>START DATE (this season)</b>	12th May 2014
<b>END DATE (this season)</b>	14th May 2014
<b>PREVIOUS WORK (incl. DES ref.)</b>	None
<b>MAIN (NARRATIVE) DESCRIPTION:</b> (may include information from other fields)	<p>Archaeological monitoring work was carried out at Blairquhan Castle during the digging of drains carried out in association with the laying of a new resin surface in the castle forecourt (13/01499/PP). These works were carried out between the 12th and 14th of May 2014.</p> <p>A linear stone foundation was identified approximately 16m west of the south western corner of the main castle building (between NS 36498 05449 and NS 36493 05448) which was orientated in a north-south direction. The structure lay within a linear cut which measured 0.5m in length, 1.58m wide and 0.4m deep, extending further beyond the baulks to both the north and south. The structure itself measured 1.22m wide and 0.4m thick and rested on a lining of blue grey clay which had a thickness range of 0.06-0.2m. It consisted of 1-2 courses which were visible in section and partially in plan. The stones used in the construction were rounded and unworked measuring up to 0.4-0.5m in extent and laid with the flatter edges forming an almost straight edge on the southern side. The bonding material consisted of a mix of lumps of clay similar to the lining and a dark grey sandy material.</p> <p>This foundation may be part of the original medieval castle, a Kennedy stronghold which dates to 1346 and which is said to be located under the lawn sitting to the immediate south of the forecourt. Alternatively, it may represent the remains of a barmkin wall added to the castle in 1573. Walls in other medieval castle sites in the south of Scotland, such as at Buckholm in Selkirkshire, have been shown to have similar dimensions and composition as the foundation remains at Blairquhan so it seems more likely that the remains were from the later barmkin.</p>
<b>PROPOSED FUTURE WORK:</b>	None

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<b>CAPTION(S) FOR ILLUSTRS:</b>	None
<b>SPONSOR OR FUNDING BODY:</b>	CASA Design Architects
<b>ADDRESS OF MAIN CONTRIBUTOR:</b>	Unit 8 Ashgrove Workshops, Kilwinning, Ayrshire KA13 6PU
<b>E MAIL:</b>	contact@rathmell-arch.co.uk
<b>ARCHIVE LOCATION</b> (intended/deposited)	Report to West of Scotland Archaeology Service and archive to RCAHMS Collections

## Contact Details

Rathmell Archaeology can be contacted at our Registered Office or through the web:

Rathmell Archaeology Ltd  
Unit 8 Ashgrove Workshops  
Kilwinning  
Ayrshire  
KA13 6PU

[www.rathmell-arch.co.uk](http://www.rathmell-arch.co.uk)

t.: 01294 542848

f.: 01294 542849

e.: [contact@rathmell-arch.co.uk](mailto:contact@rathmell-arch.co.uk)

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