

Dean Castle Country Park: Archaeology Project

Interim Report



by Alan Matthews

issued 2nd June 2015

on behalf of East Ayrshire Leisure

RATHMELL 
ARCHAEOLOGY LTD

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Introduction

1. This Interim Report has been prepared to present the results of archaeological excavations undertaken at Dean Castle Country Park on behalf of East Ayrshire Leisure, Ayrshire Archaeological and Natural History Society and the community in support of their investigations within Dean Castle Country Park.
2. These works formed part of a wider programme of works planned to investigate the archaeological potential of several areas in Dean Castle Country Park which involve the local community. This report describes work undertaken on the 30th and 31st of May 2015 which involved the investigation of potential structures to the south of Dean Castle.
3. The work was undertaken by volunteers supported and supervised by staff from the Countryside Ranger Service at Dean Park and by staff from Rathmell Archaeology Ltd. Rathmell Archaeology Ltd has been appointed to undertake the development and implementation of archaeological works including supervision of volunteers.

Scope of Works

4. The potential archaeological resource within Dean Castle Country Park is large and varied, and a range of heritage targets have been identified by East Ayrshire Leisure. It is the aim of this overall project to subject specified areas of Dean Castle Country Park to survey and targeted excavation. The nature of the works undertaken will change as appropriate while remaining within the limits of the works described in the Method Statement (Matthews 2015).
5. The works undertaken on the 30th and 31st of May 2015 specifically targeted an area to the south of Dean Castle, an area currently used as a deer paddock. This partially forested landscape retains features of a 17th or 18th century coal mining landscape in the form of spoil tips, bell pit mouths and occasional structures. Archaeological work was carried out in the early 70s to investigate a group of structures located in close proximity to the mining remains, with a view to determining if they were workers' houses or other related industrial remains. The archaeological works undertaken were intended to compliment the work done in the 70s and to further enhance our knowledge and understanding of these surviving remains.

Archaeological Works

6. Archaeological excavation works were undertaken on the 30th and 31st of May 2015 and carried out in keeping with the Method Statement (Matthews 2015). Archaeological excavation works were carried out by volunteers under the supervision of staff from Rathmell Archaeology Ltd., with Rathmell Archaeology Ltd responsible for the organisation of the archaeological work. The archaeological work was tailored according to the conditions on the day and the range of volunteers available to carry it out.
7. The scheduling of volunteers had been arranged by the Countryside Ranger Service at Dean Park. Each working day was split into a morning session (running from 10:00 until 12:30), and an afternoon session (running from 13:00 until 15:30). The number of volunteers available for a single session varied, ranging from a minimum of 3 on the Sunday morning to a maximum of 9 on the Sunday afternoon. The ages of the volunteers also varied, ranging from young children under the supervision of an adult to adults. All volunteers were given the opportunity to carry out archaeological excavation work and assist in basic recording methods.

Findings

8. Undulating ground alongside the eastern fence of the deer paddock indicated the presence of buried structures. The findings from excavations carried out in the early 70s suggested that these were stone built structures related to mine workings lying to the south and also located within the deer paddock. Two trenches were excavated over the course of the weekend. These were placed in the south-west and north-west corners of what has been interpreted as a large central structure located adjacent to the modern fence. These trenches measured roughly 3m by 1m in extent and ran diagonally across the corners.



Figure 1: Trench 2 (on the left) and Trench 1 (on the right)



Figure 2: Possible wall foundation in Trench 1

9. Both trenches revealed similar sediment although Trench 1 (the southernmost) was excavated to a greater depth. The topsoil, (101) and (201), in both cases consisted of dark brown sandy silt with frequent small stones. The depth of the topsoil varied but was generally about 200mm deep. Beneath this was a compact layer of medium to small stones with frequent inclusions of mortar, (102) and (202). This layer was suggestive of building rubble and contained several small finds. Beneath this, in both trenches was a further layer of possible building rubble, (103) and (203), consisting of medium sized, water-worn stones and inclusions of mortar. This layer was much more compact and level than the layers above.
10. Only in Trench 1 was there time to excavate through layer (103). Beneath this was a layer of large water-worn boulders and medium-sized angular stones with some seemingly *in situ* mortar. From the small area which was exposed, it was possible to surmise that this may have represented the foundation course of an *in situ* building material, the remains in question suggesting the corner of a stone wall approximately 500mm thick. No artefacts were recovered from this depth and it was not possible to confirm the line of this wall in Trench 2.
11. Fragments of white glazed earthenware with a blue-and-white transfer-printed design were recovered from Trenches 1 and 2. Fragments of mortar and CBM were observed in both trenches with a small sample recovered for examination. A fragment of worked stone was also recovered from Trench 1, potentially derived from a window or doorway. A copper alloy coin was recovered from Trench 2, but it was so badly worn that the legend was illegible. The trenches were located and recorded before backfilling was carried out on the Sunday afternoon by staff from Rathmell Archaeology Ltd and the Countryside Ranger Service at Dean Park. All significant finds were retained.

Discussion

12. The archaeological works were able to confirm the potential for survival of structural remains in the location identified as the site of buildings possibly associated with 17th or 18th century coal mining activities. Traces of mortar and possible demolition material were recovered from both trenches along with some anthropic material. None of the material recovered was earlier than the 19th century in date. The additional excavation carried out in Trench 1 was able to reach a possible foundation course which may have represented the remains of a wall defining the corner of a structure. This wall was not located in Trench 2.
13. It is clear from the mortar fragments and the other structural material recovered that there is the potential for recovery of additional archaeological material from this site. There is also the potential for uncovering *in situ* structural remains, however, the presence of such remains could not be confirmed within the scope of works and in the timeframe available.

Conclusion

14. Archaeological excavations were carried out over the weekend of 30th and 31st of May 2015 at Dean Castle Country Park on behalf of East Ayrshire Leisure, Ayrshire Archaeological and Natural History Society and the community in support of their investigation of Dean Castle Country Park. The archaeological work focused on the investigation of possible structural remains thought to relate to 17th or 18th century coal mining activities which took place to the south of the castle. Two trenches were opened, excavated and recorded by volunteers under supervision from Rathmell Archaeology Ltd and the Countryside Ranger Service. Some anthropic material was recovered consistent with although none was earlier than the 19th century in date and while the possible foundation course of a wall was uncovered, insufficient evidence was uncovered to confirm it as such.

Acknowledgements

15. I am grateful to the staff of the Countryside Ranger Service at Dean Park for their assistance with the organisation and excavation work. Also to Louise Turner who supervised the archaeological recording on site and to the volunteers who carried out the archaeological excavation.

References

Matthews. A, 2015, *Dean Castle Country Park: Community Archaeology Investigation, Method Statement*, Rathmell Archaeology Ltd,

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