

Portencross Castle, North Ayrshire: Archaeological Investigation

Assessment Report

by Thomas Rees & Claire Williamson

issued 26th April 2018

on behalf of Friends of Portencross Castle

RATHMELL 
ARCHAEOLOGY LTD

Quality Assurance

This report covers works which have been undertaken in keeping with the issued brief as modified by the agreed programme of works. The report has been prepared in keeping with the guidance of Rathmell Archaeology Limited on the preparation of reports. All works reported on within this document have been undertaken in keeping with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' Standards and Policy Statements and Code of Conduct.

Signed Claire Williamson Date ...26th April 2018...

In keeping with the procedure of Rathmell Archaeology Limited this document and its findings have been reviewed and agreed by an appropriate colleague:

Checked LM Clinsty Date ...26th April 2018...

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Quality Assurance Data

Author(s)	Claire Williamson & Thomas Rees		
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Commissioning Body	Friends of Portencross Castle		
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Rathmell Archaeology Code	RA16074	OASIS Ref	rathmell1- 315496
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NGR	NS 1757 4892	Parish	West Kilbride
Designation(s)	None		
Canmore IDs	None		

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Introduction

1. This Assessment Report has been prepared for the Friends of Portencross to report on supplementary investigative works to clarify issues relating to the nature of sediment along the line of the proposed drainage system including outfall from Portencross Castle, North Ayrshire. These archaeological works were designed to inform the design of appropriate and proportional mitigation works to address any adverse impact on the archaeological remains from the proposed drainage work.
2. A full archaeological and historical background is available from past archaeological work on Portencross Castle (see James 2009). Previous archaeological investigations within the periphery of the castle have been undertaken either in response to the renewal of the castle or to facilitate the design of the proposed drainage system:

Table 1: Previous Investigations

Year	Character	Publication
2009	Watching Brief on shallow path works & Topographic Survey at 20cm resolution.	James, H 2009 <i>Portencross Castle: Standing Building Survey and Watching Brief</i> , unpublished commercial document by GUARD
2015	Evaluation to the east of the castle and south of path for drainage route.	Ferry, D & James, H 2015 <i>Interim Report on Archaeological Works at Portencross Castle</i> , unpublished internal project document by Northlight Heritage*
2017a	Evaluation delivering Trench 1 on north side of path.	James, H 2017a <i>Portencross Castle Evaluation, Short Report 1 (23/01/17)</i> , unpublished commercial document by Northlight Heritage**
2017b	Evaluation delivering Trenches 2 to 5 on line of proposed drainage route.	James, H 2017a <i>Portencross Castle Evaluation, Short Report 2 (21/03/17)</i> , unpublished commercial document by Northlight Heritage**

*this report has not been available during the preparation of this assessment

**no plan of works is available from these reports, note their depiction in Figure 1 is based on the available information (textual and images) and cannot be fully relied upon

3. Rathmell Archaeology Limited has been appointed by the Friends of Portencross to consider our cumulative understanding of the archaeological resource along the length of the proposed drainage scheme, to undertake supplementary investigations where appropriate and to comment on an appropriate mitigation strategy should the scheme be assessed to be compliant with the development plan (in terms of the protection of our archaeological resource).

Project Works

4. The programme of works comprised the archaeological excavation of five Site Investigation test pits located at different points along the proposed route of the drainage system based on the engineer's drawings as measured by the client and project architect (see Figure 1 and Table 2 for details).
5. The works took place on the 24th April 2018 with all test pits excavated by hand. In compliance with the Risk Assessment Method Statement (Rees 2018) any potential archaeological features were investigated and recorded. All works were conducted in accordance with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' Standards and Policy Statements and Code of Conduct and Historic Environment Scotland Policy Statements.

Findings

6. The works did not locate significant archaeological horizons. Typically they exposed shallow topsoil (0.1 to 0.3m) with modern (19th to 21st century) inclusions over either gravel (TP1 & TP3), bedrock (TP4) or silty sand (TP5). One test pit (TP2) was halted when a modern

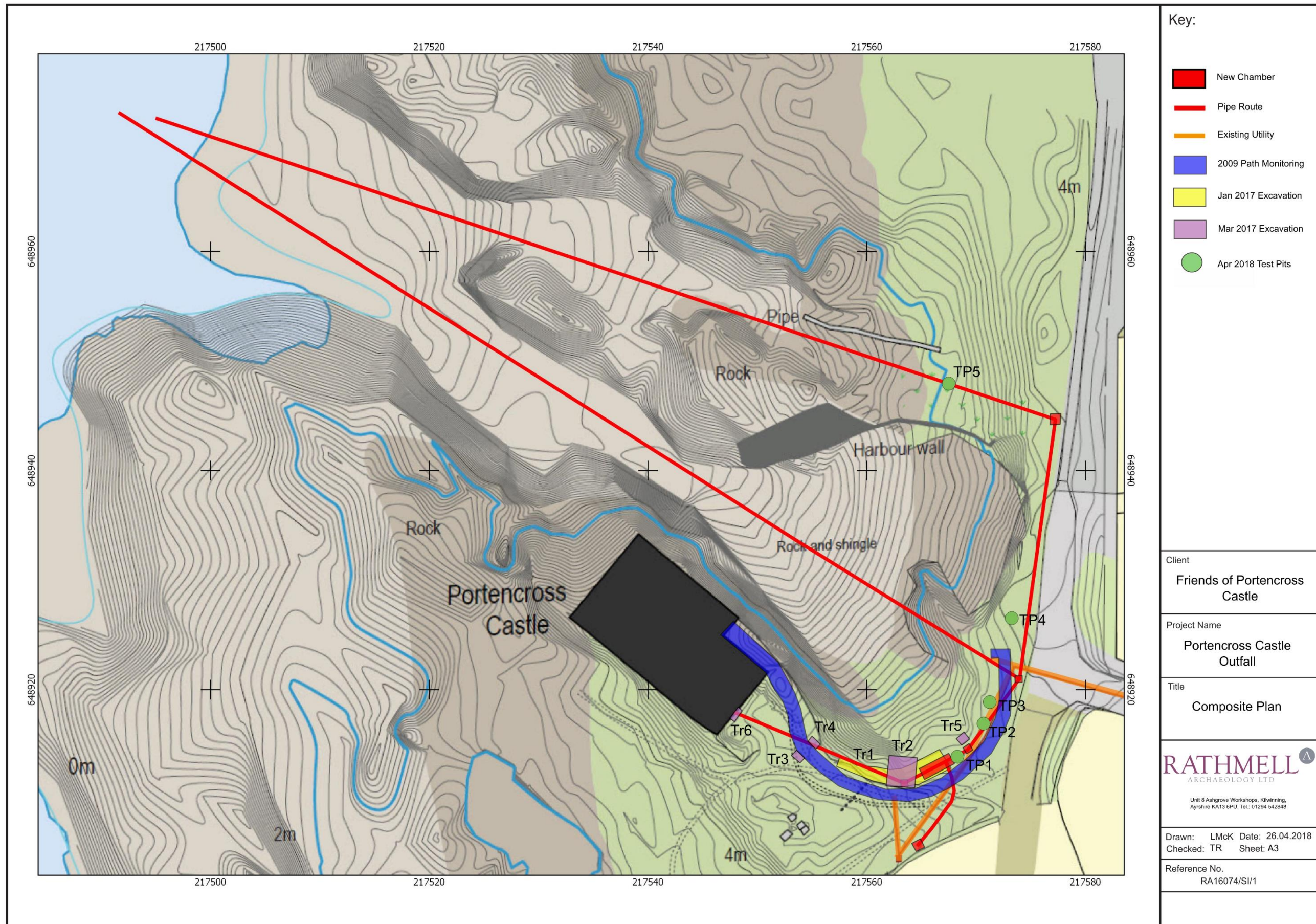


Figure 1: Plan showing locations of Test Pits and previous archaeological events (relative to topographic survey and build elements)

Table 2: Test Pit Details

Within this appendix a standardised set of data pertaining to the test pits is presented.

Test Pit	NGR	Dimensions	Descriptions	Artefacts	Image
1	NS 17568 48913	0.25m x 0.25m x 0.3m deep	(001) Moderately Compact Mid-Brown Silty Sand, 0.2m Deep (002) Dark Black Brown Silt & Gravel, 0.1m Deep	Plastic comb from (002) Ceramic Building Material from (002)	
2	NS 17570 48916	0.25m x 0.25m x 0.2m deep	(003) Dark Black Brown Silt & Gravel, 0.2m Deep Contained Modern Plastic Pipe at Base.	Modern Metal Fragments from (003)	
3	NS 17571 48918	0.25m x 0.25m x 0.33m deep	(004) Compacted Mid-Brown Clayey Sand, 0.1m Deep (005) Loose Very Dark Brown Sandy Silt, 0.23-0.25m Deep (006) Gravel	Plastic Wrapping from (005) Sherd of Blue & White Glazed Pottery from (005)	
4	NS 17573 48926	0.25m x 0.25m x 0.3m deep	(007) Moderately Compact Dark-Brown Silty Sand, 0.3m Deep (008) Bedrock (across extent of pit base)	None	
5	NS 17567 48948	0.25m x 0.25m x 0.4m deep	(009) Quite Compact Mid-Brown Silty Sand, 0.2m Deep (010) Moderately Compact Dark Brown Silty Sand with Frequent Gravel Inclusions, 0.2m Deep (011) Quite Compact Mid-Brown Silt met at Base	Glass Fragments from (010) White Glazed Pottery from (010)	



Figure 2a: Enclosure wall exposed during watching brief in 2009 (after James, Plate 59)



Figure 2b: Trench 1 showing bedrock (after James 2017a, Fig 5)



Figure 3a: Trench 2 within footprint Trench 1 (after James 2017b, Fig 3)



Figure 3b: Trench 3 (left) & 4 (right) straddling path (after James 2017b, Fig 4)

service was exposed. See Table 2 and Figure 1 for details and locations.

Discussion

7. No significant archaeological features were uncovered during the course of the test pit works. This adds to a pattern of evidence from the 2017 evaluations (James 2017a and 2017b) that the line of the proposed drainage is characterised as:
 - a. the initial 15m running from the castle to the western side of Trench 2 that is shallow topsoil (up to 0.3m) over bedrock. Some small stones chocked amongst the bedrock were taken by the excavator to suggest an irregular surface (see Trenches 3 & 4). Any late or post-medieval artefacts recovered are *ex situ* within modern deposits (i.e. 19th century and later);
 - b. a 4m stretch (covering the first inspection chamber and the initial portion of the septic tank) that was characterised by Trench 2 as boulders and angular blocks that did not deliver a coherent structure although the excavator suggested it may have been a slipped or spread wall from at least the late medieval period. Again most late or post-medieval artefacts recovered are *ex situ* within modern deposits (i.e. 19th century and later);
 - c. the balance of the drainage route that is characterized by shallow topsoil (up to 0.3m) over gravel, silty sand or beach cobbles with no suggestion of significant material culture (i.e. no pre-19th century material) or strata.
8. As no significant *in situ* structural remains were revealed within the suite of investigative works on the alignment being proposed for the drainage route (as shown in Figure 1) then, subject to a suitable landform and finish of the works to suppress its visibility, this proposal will not reasonably constitute an adverse impact on the archaeological resource and hence is compliant with the development plan.
9. The immediate area around Portencross Castle is archaeologically sensitive. The watching brief works on the path exposed the uppermost fabric of a surviving wall cutting off the peninsula some 13.5m southeast of the castle (see James 2009 and Figure 1). The detailed topographic survey (*ibid.*) also recorded a marked rectilinear structure to the southwest of the new path, on a common alignment with the castle and potentially linked to the exposed wall. While these known features are not affected by the line of the proposed drainage route, they illustrate the broader utilisation of the peninsula during the medieval to post-medieval period.
10. There remains a residual potential for the exposure of *ex situ* significant artefacts and small pockets of *in situ* strata not located by the investigative works. In addition, ephemeral remains of structures, wall lines and wear patterns may be discernible in the character of the bedrock surface. On this basis it is proportionate to undertake an archaeological watching brief during all soft sediment ground breaking works including the exposure of the bedrock surface (where this occurs). This watching brief should be controlled by a Written Scheme of Investigation agreed with the planning authority with the expectation that should significant materials be recovered (information, sediment and/or artefacts) that appropriate post-excavation analysis and publication will be required.
11. The appropriateness and acceptability of our recommendations rest with North Ayrshire Council and their advisors, the West of Scotland Archaeology Service.

Conclusion

12. A programme of supplementary archaeological investigative works was required by the Friends of Portencross Castle to resolve outstanding issues regarding the potential adverse impact from a proposed drainage at Portencross Castle, North Ayrshire. Five test pits were excavated during this phase of works. No significant archaeological remains were uncovered. The compilation of the findings from all the works delivered at Portencross enabled the characterisation of the archaeological impact from the proposal and formulation of recommendations for the appropriate mitigation measures.

Appendix 1: Registers

Within this appendix are all registers pertaining to works on-site.

Context Register

Context No.	Test Pit No.	Type	Description	Interpretation
001	1	Deposit	Moderately Compact Mid-Brown Silty Sand. 0.2m Deep	Turf/Topsoil
002	1	Deposit	Dark Black Brown Silt & Gravel. 0.1m Deep	Subsoil
003	2	Deposit	Dark Black Brown Silt & Gravel. 0.2m Deep	Subsoil
004	3	Deposit	Compacted Mid-Brown Clayey Sand. 0.1m Deep	Turf/Topsoil
005	3	Deposit	Loose Very Dark Brown Sandy Silt. 0.23-0.25m Deep	Topsoil
006	3	Deposit	Gravel	Beach Deposit
007	4	Deposit	Moderately Compact Dark-Brown Silty Sand. 0.3m Deep	Turf/Topsoil
008	4	Deposit	Bedrock	Bedrock
009	5	Deposit	Quite Compact Mid-Brown Silty Sand 0.2m Deep	Turf/Topsoil
010	5	Deposit	Moderately Compact Dark Brown Silty Sand with Frequent Gravel Inclusions 0.2m Deep	Subsoil
011	5	Deposit	Quite Compact Mid-Brown Silt	Beach Deposit

Photographic Register

Image No.	Digital	Description	From	Date
1	8453	General Shot of Test Pit 1	NW	24/04/18
2	8454	General Shot of Test Pit 1	NW	24/04/18
3	8455	General Shot of Test Pit 1	WNW	24/04/18
4	8456	General Shot of Test Pit 2	WNW	24/04/18
5	8457	General Shot of Test Pit 2	WNW	24/04/18
6	8458	General Shot of Test Pit 2	WNW	24/04/18
7	8459	General Shot of Test Pit 3	WNW	24/04/18
8	8460	General Shot of Test Pit 3	W	24/04/18
9	8461	General Shot of Test Pit 3	W	24/04/18
10	8462	General Shot of Test Pit 3	W	24/04/18
11	8463	General Shot of Test Pit 3	W	24/04/18
12	8464	West Facing Section of Test Pit 3	W	24/04/18

Image No.	Digital	Description	From	Date
13	8465	General Shot of Test Pit 4	W	24/04/18
14	8466	General Shot of Test Pit 4	W	24/04/18
15	8467	General Shot of Test Pit 4	W	24/04/18
16	8468	General Shot of Test Pit 4	W	24/04/18
17	8469	General Shot of Test Pit 5	W	24/04/18
18	8470	General Shot of Test Pit 5	W	24/04/18
19	8471	West Facing Section of Test Pit 5	W	24/04/18
20	8472	West Facing Section of Test Pit 5	W	24/04/18
21	8473	General Shot – Flags Mark Test Pits 1-4	NE	24/04/18
22	8474	General Shot – Flags Mark Test Pits 2-4	SW	24/04/18
23	8475	General Shot – Flags Mark Test Pit 5	NE	24/04/18
24	8476	General Shot – Flags Mark Test Pit 5	ENE	24/04/18
25	8477	General Shot Across Whole Area	NE	24/04/18

Appendix 2: Discovery & Excavation in Scotland

LOCAL AUTHORITY:	North Ayrshire
PROJECT TITLE/SITE NAME:	Portencross Castle – Site Investigation Works
PROJECT CODE:	RA16074
PARISH:	West Kilbride
NAME OF CONTRIBUTOR:	Claire Williamson
NAME OF ORGANISATION:	Rathmell Archaeology Limited
TYPE(S) OF PROJECT:	Test Pits
NMRS NO(S):	None
SITE/MONUMENT TYPE(S):	None
SIGNIFICANT FINDS:	None
NGR (2 letters, 8 or 10 figures)	NS 1757 4892 (centred on)
START DATE (this season)	24 th April 2018
END DATE (this season)	24 th April 2018
PREVIOUS WORK (incl. DES ref.)	None
MAIN (NARRATIVE) DESCRIPTION: (may include information from other fields)	A programme of archaeological works was required to supplement previous investigations in early 2017 to inform on the nature of sediments and archaeological strata along the line of a proposed drainage from Portencross Castle. Five small test pits were excavated, no significant archaeological material was recovered or identified.
PROPOSED FUTURE WORK:	None
CAPTION(S) FOR ILLUSTRS:	None
SPONSOR OR FUNDING BODY:	Friends of Portencross
ADDRESS OF MAIN CONTRIBUTOR:	Unit 8 Ashgrove Workshops, Kilwinning, Ayrshire KA13 6PU
E MAIL:	contact@rathmell-arch.co.uk
ARCHIVE LOCATION (intended/deposited)	Report to West of Scotland Archaeology Service and archive to NRHE.

References

Rees, T 2018 Portencross Castle Outfall, *North Ayrshire: Risk Assessment Method Statement*, unpublished commercial document by Rathmell Archaeology Ltd

Contact Details

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

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