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Minor Archaeological Services Call-Off Contract Spynie Palace, Moray (PIC263) Tree Felling Operations

Walkover Survey, December 2017
Report No. HES-PIC263-2017-01

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Minor Archaeological Services Call-Off Contract

Spynie Palace, Moray

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CONTENTS

1.	Introduction	3
2.	Working Methods	5
3.	Archaeological Results	6
4.	Conclusions	8
5.	Bibliography	8

Appendices

1.	Photograph Register	9
2.	Discovery and Excavation in Scotland Entry	9

Illustrations (bound at rear)

Fig. 1	Location plan showing survey area and recorded features
Fig. 2	General view of survey area
Fig. 3	Site 1 – Earthwork Bank
Fig. 4	Site 2 – Block of Moulded Stone
Fig. 5	Site 3 – Diffuse Stone Spread
Fig. 6	Site 4 – Stone Block
Fig. 7	Site 5 - Bank of Stones/ Possible Former Wall
Fig. 8	Site 6 – Collapsed Wall
Fig. 9	Site 7 – Bishop’s Well
Fig. 10	Site 8 – Corn Drying Kiln

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 General

This report presents the results of a walkover survey and topographic survey carried out by CFA Archaeology Ltd (CFA) between the 5th and 8th December 2017 within c.2.4ha of woodland surrounding Spynie Palace, Moray (Fig. 1) (NGR: NJ 23091 65852). The work was commissioned by Historic Environment Scotland (HES) as part of the Minor Archaeological Services Call-off Contract.

The walkover and topographic surveys were requested in advance of tree felling in three areas surrounding Spynie Palace, in order to better understand the impacts of forestry operations on the archaeological remains and to inform a more detailed mitigation strategy for the forestry operations.

The archaeological work was carried out under the terms of the HES archaeology call-off contract. The surveys followed the archaeological methodology that was defined in a method statement agreed with HES (CFA 2017). The woodland surrounding the palace was divided into three areas: Area A – the woodland to the north of the current access track to the palace; Area B – the woodland to the immediate north and west of the palace; and Area C – the existing entrance to the palace grounds and the woodland to the immediate east (Fig. 1).

1.2 Historical Background

A desk-based assessment was produced by Historic Environment Scotland for the proposed elm extraction in the woodland surrounding the palace and its grounds (Sagrott 2017). The DBA detailed the historical background of Spynie Palace and the surrounding area, and is summarised below.

Spynie Palace is located on a low ridge of Cherty Rock (c.10m above Ordnance Datum) to the immediate south of the Spynie Depression, a post-glacial loch, which Spynie Palace was immediately adjacent to. The earliest evidence of the palace is a Ringwork Castle that dates from the early 12th century.

It is suggested that the topography around the palace complex has been altered through several episodes of landscaping, carried out in preparation for various alterations and construction works on the palace itself, particularly in the 14th and 15th centuries.

Spynie Palace was situated on the southern shores of Loch Spynie, a large loch that was connected to the sea until channels between the loch and sea were cut off in the late 15th century. The loch remained important for fishing and transport until the 18th century, when work began to drain the loch for farmland; an effort which intensified when Telford constructed a drainage channel in the early 19th century. There is evidence that the ‘toun of Spynie’ or ‘Spynietoun’, predominantly a fishing settlement, was situated to the west and south of the palace up until the beginning of the 19th century. An engraving from the late 18th century depicts Fisherman’s Cottages on the loch edge.

The extant remains of Spynie Palace date from the 14th century, which includes the present curtain wall. During the 15th century David's Tower was constructed and the entrance gate was moved from the south wall to the east wall. There was significant remodelling and rebuilding undertaken at this time. During the 16th-17th centuries an additional wall was constructed just outside the curtain wall. In the 16th century gardens and orchards were recorded at the palace, most likely located to the south of the palace. In the 17th century a 'cachepall' (tennis court) is recorded, again just south of the palace: however, by the end of the 17th century Spynie Palace was recorded as abandoned. The palace quickly fell into ruin and was plundered for its iron work, wood and stone. In 1825 the ruins of the palace were taken on by the Barons of the Exchequer who built a custodians lodge, planted hardwood trees in the grounds and constructed the present access track to the palace (from the west). In 1920 the palace was scheduled as an Ancient Monument and was given into guardianship in 1973.

1.3 Previous Archaeological Work

The previous archaeological work that has taken place on the site is summarised in the DBA (Sagrott 2017). The work comprises: an excavation that was recorded by CECA (Committee on Early Coastal Archaeology) of an 'extensive shell midden and flint scatter' (Sloan 1985); and 'extensive archaeological investigations' during a period of cleaning and consolidating of the monument between 1986 and 1994, prior to its public opening, recorded in Lewis & Pringle (2002). These are summarised below.

Area A

During the 1980s and 1990s excavation work a number of features were identified on the location of the present cottage at the place entranceway. These uncovered three cooking pits, a hearth, a linear gully and several deposits of marine shells. Trenches were excavated further to the east in the vicinity of 'Bishop's Well'. The trenches revealed the remains of structures that were located on the lochside including: a crude floor of flagstones and cobbles, a rectangular plank-built trough, an upright post and a post-pit. The trenches also uncovered a wall of a structure constructed of rubble bonded with pink clay and a low mound that was excavated and found to comprise the remains of a grain-drying kiln constructed of rubble bonding. A further trench also identified sherds of window glass and fragments of late 18th/early 19th century earthenware vessels.

Area B

Excavation works were carried out on the area immediately north of the curtain wall of the palace in the location of the 'Watergate', the access to the lochside from the palace wall. The excavations revealed a range of lean-to timber buildings against the curtain wall that had flagged stone floors and contained artefacts dated to the 14th century. Work on the actual Watergate itself, the late 14th century entranceway through the north curtain wall, uncovered a large pit built of drystone masonry that was fed by a drain system with a probable retractable bridge that was identified as a security device. A series of sandstone blocks leading north-east from the pit were identified as the likely pathway leading to the lochside 'where a harbour or landing stage would most likely be located'.

Area C

Previous archaeological work in this area comprises evaluation work on the east curtain wall and the area immediately beyond it. Part of a metalled road was identified from the east gate of the palace that led east before turning southwards.

A number of investigative trenches beyond Area C, to the south of the palace, were excavated to try and locate the gardens, orchards and tennis court that are recorded in this location.

1.4 Objectives

The objectives of the programme of archaeological works were to establish the nature, location and extent of the archaeological resource within the three areas of woodland surrounding Spynie Palace. The results of the survey will provide information in order to better understand the impacts of forestry operations on the archaeological remains and to inform a more detailed mitigation strategy for the forestry operations, to allow HES to plan the best extraction routes for the timber.

2. WORKING METHODS

2.1 General

All work was conducted in accordance with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA) 'Code of Conduct', and other relevant CIfA Standards and Guidance. The archaeological survey work was carried out in line with the methodology outlined out in the method statement.

2.2 Walkover Survey

The walkover survey was carried out to identify the extent of, and provide a record of, any upstanding remains of cultural heritage sites. It was carried out in a methodical manner along parallel transects progressing from east to west in each of the three designated areas.

A written and graphic account of all surface remains present was made. All individual features were describes, photographed, sketched, and provided with an OS grid reference.

2.3 Topographic Survey

The topographic survey was carried out alongside the walkover survey to record the location and character of the features that were identified during the walkover. The survey took the form of an Integrated Survey (IS), using both differential (RTK) GPS and robotic Total Station. A Trimble R10 GPS receiver paired with a Trimble robotic S6 Total Station with multi-track receiver allowed features under dense tree cover to be accurately surveyed. The topographic survey enabled the production of an annotated scale plan of the features identified within the site in relation to the designated felling areas (Fig. 1).

3. ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESULTS

The conditions during the survey work were generally cool and dry. As anticipated, much of the ground surface was obscured by the woodland tree cover and dead vegetation (Fig. 2).

In total eight field survey monuments (referred to as 'sites') were recorded during the walkover, the locations of which are shown on Fig. 1. The results of the walkover are broken down into the designated areas and presented below. The walkover was carried out from east to west across the site (Area C to Area A).

Area C

The walkover survey identified three sites in Area C: Sites 1, 2 and 3.

Site 1 – Earthwork Bank (Fig. 3)

A wide, curving crescent-shaped bank leading from the area around the palace's east gate to the north-east. It survived as a prominent earthwork. The feature was evident for approximately 60m in length and was c.16m wide. The northern face of the bank dropped down suddenly to the former lochside. The earthwork survived to approximately 1.9m in height. It is suggested that the bank may have functioned as an access track from the east gate of the palace to the loch's putative quayside at the north of the palace.

Site 2 – Block of Moulded Stone (Fig. 4)

A single block of moulded stone was identified on the ground within a tight cluster of trees. The stone was roughly triangular in shape and dressed on two sides with a shaped face and a cut groove running down it. There was no evidence of mortar or plaster adhering to the block. The stone was 0.4m long, 0.3m wide and 0.25m high.

Site 3 – Diffuse Stone Spread (Fig. 5)

At the northern edge of Area C on the inferred location of the former lochside was a large diffuse spread of irregularly shaped, rough, natural stone blocks. None of the rocks exhibited signs of being dressed or hewn in any way. It is possible the stones would have sat in or near to the loch bed, possibly as a form of revetting for the water's edge, or possible quayside. It is also conceivable that the stones are natural in origin and have subsequently eroded from the bank side and have slumped towards the former loch edge since the loch was drained in the 18th/19th centuries.

Area B

The walkover survey identified three sites in Area B: Sites 4, 5 and 6.

Site 4 – Stone Block (Fig. 6)

A rectangular block of stone lying was identified on the ground surface. There were no signs of mortar or plaster on the stone. The stone was 0.70m long, 0.40m wide and 0.40m high.

Site 5 – Bank of Stones/ Possible Former Wall (Fig. 7)

A linear feature, comprising a moss-covered bank of stones c.3m wide, was identified to the north of the palace. The feature was heavily obscured by large collapsed dead trees, which made it problematic to accurately investigate. The feature ran parallel to the base of the slope for the lochside to the immediate north of the palace keep. It is possible that the feature is simply a tumble of stones, although the spread of stones was quite well defined where visible amongst the dead trees and fallen branches. Potentially the feature is the denuded remains of a former stone built structure such as a wall or a collapsed building built into the base of the slope. The feature sits approximately 3m from the base of the lochside, as the ground level appears at present day. It survived to a maximum height of 0.5m above the existing sloping ground surface.

Site 6 – Collapsed Wall (Fig. 8)

The former line of a dressed stone wall was identified on a north-to-south orientation. It survived as a 35m long linear mound of stones that was recorded as c.2.5m wide and surviving to a height of c.0.4m above the ground surface. The wall appeared to have a definite northern terminus, where it met the sloping ground surface of the former lochside, and was set into the ground surface. The southern end of the wall was more diffuse.

Area C

The walkover survey identified two sites in Area B: Sites 7 and 8.

Site 7 – Bishop’s Well (Fig. 9)

The walkover identified the former well, set into the bank side, at the foot of the existing trackway to the palace (constructed c.1825). The ‘Bishop’s Well’ was previously identified in the former excavation works, albeit without a recorded location (Sagrott 2017, 3), and is believed to date from the earlier recorded settlement at Spynie (the ‘toun’ of Spynie), or at least the 18th century.

At the time of the walkover it was recorded as a stone-built well set into the bank side, or possible lochside. It was exposed to a maximum height of three courses at the southern portion of the feature, at which point water ingress, from the still active well, made it problematic to expose any more of the stone courses. The well was 0.9m in external diameter. As others on site, it was heavily overgrown and obscured by leaf litter and dead branches/undergrowth.

Site 8 – Corn Drying Kiln (Fig.10)

The remains of a corn drying kiln, previously identified in earlier excavation work, were found close to the purported location of the former lochside. The kiln was evident as a low U-shaped mound with a flue-like entrance appearing to lie to the north-east of the feature. Similarly to Site 7, Bishop’s Well, this feature was previously identified in the former excavation works (*ibid.*, 4). A modern geo-textile was identified over the extant stone feature, presumably from the 1980s/90s excavation.

4. CONCLUSION

A walkover survey and topographic survey were carried out by CFA Archaeology Ltd within woodland surrounding Spynie Palace, Moray. The walkover and topographic surveys were requested in advance of tree felling in three areas surrounding the Palace of Spynie, in order to better understand the impacts of forestry operations on the archaeological remains and to inform a more detailed mitigation strategy for the forestry operations.

A number of features were identified that are attributed to the medieval and later use of the palace grounds and former lochside location to the west of the palace of Spynie. The features mainly survived as low earthworks that were heavily overgrown and obscured by the woodland floor and dead vegetation.

The project archive, comprising all CFA record sheets, maps and reports, will be deposited with the National Record for the Historic Environment Scotland (NRHE).

A summary statement will be submitted for publication in *Discovery and Excavation in Scotland* (Appendix 2) and will also be reported on through *OASIS Scotland*.

5. BIBLIOGRAPHY

Lewis, J & Pringle, D 2002 *Spynie Palace and the Bishops of Moray: History, Architecture and Archaeology*. Society of Antiquaries of Scotland Monograph Series Number 21. Edinburgh.

Sagrott, S 2017 *Spynie Palace: Elm Extraction. Desk-Based Assessment. Cultural Resources Team Assessment*. Historic Environment Scotland. Dated 8th September 2017.

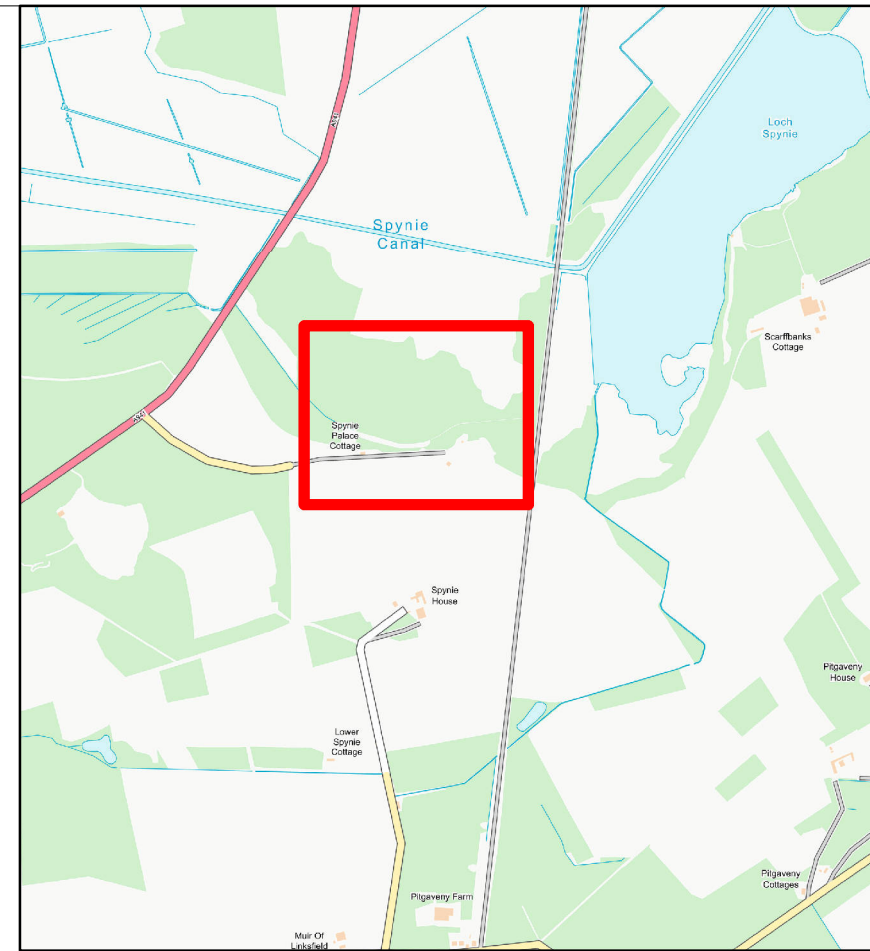
Sloan, D 1985 'Palace of Spynie (Drainie p) shell-midden and flint scatter', *Discovery Excav Scot*, p19.

APPENDIX 1: Photographic Register

Shot No.	Summary description of subject	Facing
1-3	General shots showing tree cover	-
4	Bank (Site 1)	E
5	Moulded Stone Block (Site 2)	E
6	Stone Boulder Spread (Site 3)	NE
7	Detail of boulder in Site 3	SW
8	Dressed stone block (Site 4)	SE
9	Linear stone bank/wall (Site 5)	W
10	Linear stone bank/wall (Site 6)	S
11	'Bishop's Well' (Site 7)	S
12-13	Detail of Bishop's (Site 7)	S
14	Corn Drying Kiln (Site 8)	NW

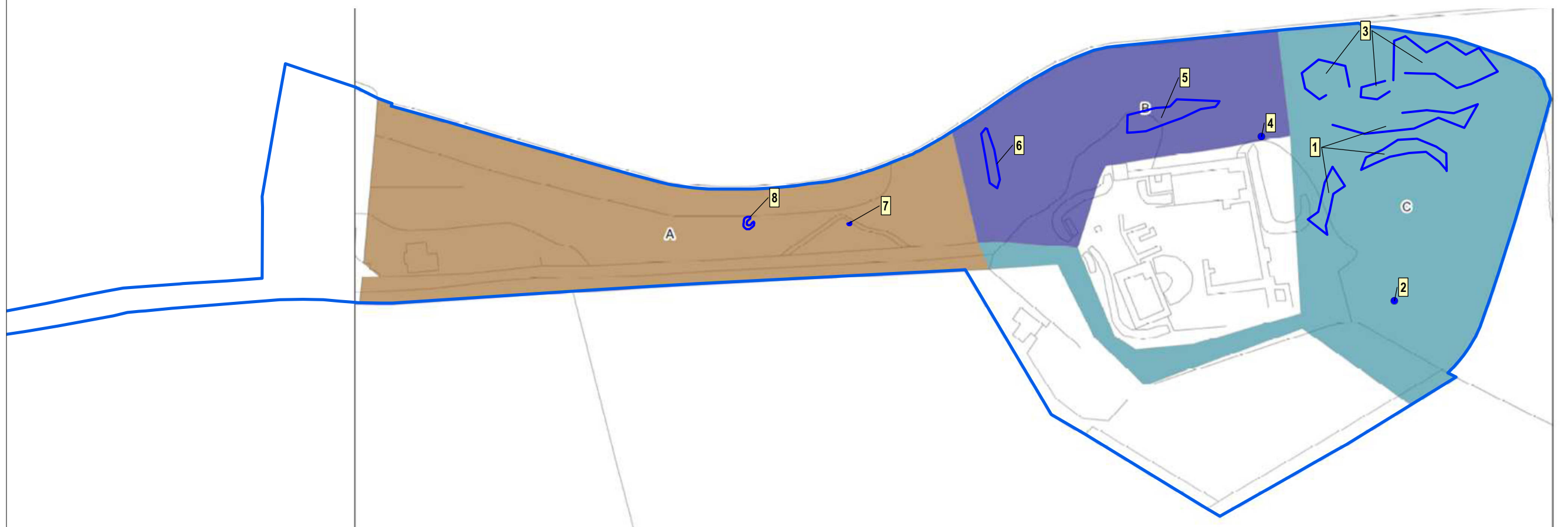
APPENDIX 2: Discovery and Excavation in Scotland Entry

LOCAL AUTHORITY:	Moray
PROJECT TITLE/SITE NAME:	Spynie Palace
PROJECT CODE:	MINA14
PARISH:	Spynie
NAME OF CONTRIBUTOR:	Mark Bell
NAME OF ORGANISATION:	CFA Archaeology Ltd
TYPE(S) OF PROJECT:	Walkover Survey, Topographic Survey
NMRS NO(S):	NJ26NW 10, NJ26NW 52, NJ26NW 30
SITE/MONUMENT TYPE(S):	N/A
SIGNIFICANT FINDS:	N/A
NGR (2 letters, 6 figures)	NJ 23091 65852
START DATE (this season)	December 2017
END DATE (this season)	December 2017
PREVIOUS WORK (incl. DES ref.)	Sloan 1985 – Palace of Spynie (Drainie p) shell-midden and flint scatter, Discovery Excav Scot. p19.
MAIN (NARRATIVE) DESCRIPTION: (May include information from other fields)	A walkover survey and topographic survey were carried out by CFA Archaeology within the grounds of Spynie Palace, as part of the Minor Archaeological Services Call Off Contract, prior to the extraction of elm trees in the woodland within the Palace Grounds. The work involved a walkover survey and topographic survey. Eight monuments associated with the historical use of the Palace and grounds were identified and recorded.
PROPOSED FUTURE WORK:	
CAPTION(S) FOR ILLUSTRS:	
SPONSOR OR FUNDING BODY:	Historic Environment Scotland
ADDRESS OF MAIN CONTRIBUTOR:	CFA Archaeology Ltd, Old Engine House, Eskmills Park, Musselburgh, EH21 7PQ.
EMAIL ADDRESS:	cfa@cfa-archaeology.co.uk
ARCHIVE LOCATION (intended/deposited)	Archive to be deposited with NRHE, reports lodged with SMR.




Key:

- PIC Boundary
- Cultural Heritage Site (point)
- Cultural Heritage Site (linear)



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Title:
Location plan showing survey area and recorded features

Project:
Spynie Palace

Client:
Historic Environment Scotland

Scale at A3:
1:1,500

Drawn by: SW	Checked by: MJ	Date: 02/02/2018
Report No: 3620	Fig. No: 1	



Fig. 2 - General view of survey area



Fig. 3 - Site 1

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Spynie Palace



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Fig. 4 - Site 2



Fig. 5 - Site 3

Project:
Spynie Palace



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Fig. 6 - Site 4



Fig. 7 - Site 5

Project:
Spynie Palace



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Report No: 3620	Fig. No: 6 - 7
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Fig. 8 - Site 6

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Spynie Palace



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Fig. 9 - Site 7



Fig. 10 - Site 8

Project:
Spynie Palace



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